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ABSTRACT

This guide may be used as a text for peer helper, lay leadership, or volunteer worker training programs. The first chapter describes the facilitative model as it applies to peer helping, and presents an overview of the guide. The second chapter examines the nature of people. Eight basic principles of human behavior are outlined. The third chapter focuses on building a close working relationship. Conditions essential in a helping relationship are discussed. The fourth chapter examines listening skills. Four steps for attentive listening are presented. The fifth chapter contains information about responding. High facilitative responses, and low facilitative responses are examined. The sixth chapter focuses on giving feedback. A facilitative feedback model is presented, as well as guidelines for giving and receiving feedback. The seventh chapter discusses problem solving. A five-step decision-making model is presented. Decision-making dialogue is included to illustrate the principles of the model. The eighth chapter suggests helping projects for peer helpers. Each project has specific goals, some of which may take specialized training and practice. The ninth chapter presents guidelines for peer helping programs. Issues examined include enlisting a trainer, determining goals, obtaining support for the program, choosing a site for training, selecting trainees, organizing the training curriculum, supervision and evaluation of services and projects, and networking with other peer trainers. (LLL)

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Peer Helping:

A Practical Guide

by

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Dedicated to:

Peer helpers everywhere
who give unselfishly of themselves
to enrich the lives of those with whom they work.

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Chapter 1

Peer Helping and the Facilitative Model

Peer helping refers to a process in which caring persons—other than licensed or certified professional counselors—assist others to think about ideas and feelings, to explore alternatives to situations, and to make responsible decisions. When these caring persons are trained to provide special assistance, they might be referred to as peer helpers.

The term "peer helper" has been used synonymously with peer facilitator, peer tutor, peer-group leader, Big Brother or Big Sister, and peer counselor. In addition, the concepts related to peer helping and peer helpers have been applied to volunteer workers, paraprofessionals, aides, and other human service assistants. The use of the word "peer" emphasizes that the helper is associated with the same general group—people of about the same age, status, or sociological makeup. The helper might also be viewed as someone from the same neighborhood, school, agency, interest area, or work place.

Peer helping makes some basic assumptions about human beings and the ways in which people tend to cope with the challenges of life. It also focuses on a set of interpersonal skills which are used to support people who are trying to think matters through and to make decisions. It encourages individuals to set goals and to take more responsibility for their actions.

With appropriate training, peer helpers can go beyond being a familiar friend or a considerate listener. The roles they assume and the functions they perform enable many kinds of organizations in every community to deliver more personal services than would otherwise be possible. There are not enough professional counselors, teachers, therapists, nurses, and social workers to meet with all the people who need special attention and timely assistance.

Sometimes an immediate and brief personal contact with a trained peer helper is all that is needed to encourage or support someone in a particular endeavor. Often, it is a simple matter of clarifying ideas or providing appropriate information. At other times, a more in depth or extended intervention is required. Under these circumstances, peer helpers, recognizing their limitations and responsibilities, refer individuals to experienced professionals.

Successful peer helper programs provide systematic training and careful supervision in interpersonal skills, careful supervision, and organized helping projects. The facilitative model, as described in this book, provides a framework of helping skills which can be applied to people of all ages and in a variety of settings. It can provide you with some direction in your work with others. It can give you the knowledge to develop the patience and confidence needed to be an effective helper. This model is the heart of a practical approach to peer helping.

The facilitative model has evolved over the years. It has been refined by both professionals and peer helpers as they searched for a practical set of interpersonal concepts and skills which could be used with individuals and in groups. More specifically, the desired characteristics of a helping relationship are first identified. These characteristics tend to emerge when facilitative skills are used to foster positive interactions between people. It is then that facilitative activities and strategies can be used to move persons toward their goals. When organized in a thoughtful way and used in different combinations, high facilitative skills and procedures provide a feasible and easily managed approach to the helping process. The following chapters are designed to help you learn more about the facilitative model and about peer helping.

Peer Helping: Common Sense or Learned Skill?

Many of the skills and concepts in this book may not be new to you. Some may seem like common sense. Others may be familiar, but perhaps, they have appeared to be isolated techniques, rather than part of an artistic pattern or scientific craft. Being a facilitative person and peer helper might be viewed as part art and part science.

The common sense or artistic part of facilitating others refers to the intuitive or emotional aspects of the process. In the art of working with others, you develop a sixth sense about relationships and react spontaneously. Some helpers have a "gut level feeling" about situations and they trust their intuition to follow the flow of a conversation. This special feeling for people and instinct for helping have led some to say, "It's a natural process, if you care enough." They rely on the art of helping and their good judgment.

On the other hand, even the most sensitive and intuitive persons can be assisted to become better helpers when they use the theories and scientific information that have resulted from research and close observation. The helping process can be improved by using facilitative skills and methods. Yet, knowledge of them alone is not enough to make a positive difference.

Being a peer helper is not only knowing *what* techniques or skills to use, it is also knowing *when* and *how* to use them. Some skeptics dislike the idea of using skills and techniques. They worry that selected words or methods imply that someone is being manipulated and that freedom and genuineness are being lost. There is probably some truth to this idea, especially when skills are forced, lack a sense of naturalness, and are unrelated to theories about helping others. Yet, when facilitative skills are practiced, used logically and with care, they can become an integrated part of your style. When used appropriately, they can reflect your attitude of acceptance, respect, understanding, interest, and willingness to help. They can enable you to communicate more effectively.

Learning the Facilitative Model

The facilitative model, as presented in this book, consists of a few basic concepts, verbal responses, and procedures. It can be learned. For example, it has been learned and used by students in the fourth grade who were working as peer facilitators and friendly helpers in their schools. It has been learned by elderly citizens who wanted to help their less fortunate peers in a convalescent home. It has been learned by volunteer workers in a crisis center who needed to talk with troubled people on telephones. After studying the facilitative model, you will, no doubt, see how it can be used in many parts of your life. But, it can be particularly useful in your role as a peer helper.

One of the first things you may notice is that some people seem to be "naturals" because they learn the model much faster than others. Or you may think that these people need no coaching because they are just naturally kind, sensitive, and effective communicators. This is usually not the case. They probably learned their interpersonal skills by watching others and by experiencing these skills while growing up. Even these "natural helpers" can learn more about communication skills and helping relationships.

Learning facilitative skills is not much different from perfecting a skill in a sport. When you first learned to swim, for example, it may have been helpful to know certain movements which enabled you to coordinate your arms, hands, legs, and breathing process. Some people have been thrown into the water and told: "Sink or swim!" It is an unpleasant experience for most, although some have learned to swim that way. Throwing beginning swimmers into the water, without teaching them some preliminary skills, causes them to thrash around, panic, struggle unnecessarily, and exert a lot of extra energy. If this happened to you, you might be even more reluctant to get into the water next time. You might even want to avoid swimming altogether.

If you had your choice in learning how to swim, you probably would prefer to work closely with a coach, someone who understands the sport of swimming. With the help of a coach, you could learn a few basic skills that would help you to survive in the water and to enjoy swimming. Of course, there would be difficult moments and learning to swim does not come quickly to some. It takes patience and practice. It takes experience. The coach's job is to break down the process, analyze it, identify the most important steps, and then select those skills and techniques that you should work on first.

You will be coached through this book, perhaps with the help of a trainer, in the art and science of being a peer helper—a facilitative person. There will be times when you will feel awkward and uncomfortable. You may wonder whether you are being phony and unnatural, because some of the skills that you will be learning are not a regular part of your daily life. It is unlikely that they have been modeled for you, unless they have been learned and practiced by others who are close to you. Remember, it takes patience and practice before things can be mastered. With time and practice, the facilitative skills will become a natural part of your life and your work with others.

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Overview of This Book

In this book the facilitative model is presented and applied to peer helping. The model consists of knowing some basic assumptions about how people learn and change, how helping relationships are formed, and how some facilitative skills help people through a thinking and decision-making process. There are four parts, each designed to coach you in the skills of 1) Relating; 2) Listening; 3) Responding; and 4) Decision-making.

After first looking at some of the characteristics of helping relationships, you will have an opportunity to think about what makes someone a good listener. All of us tend to be selective listeners. How can you be a more attentive listener? Understanding what you are hearing is important if you will be of assistance to the talker. Knowing something about human behavior generally is also important when it comes to understanding what is happening with the person you are helping.

Next, it is your time to talk. How do you respond to someone who has shared ideas and feelings with you? What do you say? There are many choices, but some are likely to be more facilitative than others. These responses might be viewed as skills, especially when clustered in a framework for helping others. Decision-making and problem-solving are also part of peer helping. You will want to know how to assist others to resolve their problems and to take more responsibility for their lives by making more of their own choices.

Peer helping can be an exciting and worthy experience for you and this book can be a practical and valuable guide. It is not a final answer or a quick and easy solution. Rather, it is the beginning of a journey in which you can learn to organize your thoughts, develop plans of action, and facilitate the helping process.

Chapter 2

The Nature of People

"Now, why did he do that?" "What made her behave that way?" Perhaps you have heard, or asked yourself, these kinds of questions when someone attracted your attention. There is a curiosity about what the person was thinking or what led that person to behave in a certain way. Peer helpers frequently ask such questions of themselves when working with others. Trying to discover some of the answers is part of the fun and the challenge of peer helping.

You are not expected to fully understand and explain why people do what they do. Explaining human behavior is difficult. Even the most knowledgeable doctors, scientists, and teachers have trouble accounting for people's behavior. There have been many books written about human behavior, providing elaborate theories and detailed illustrations. Yet, these books often fall short of giving us a complete explanation of what lies behind people's actions.

Although understanding human behavior is not easy, there are some generally accepted beliefs about the nature of human behavior which can be useful in peer helping. Some experts may take exception to them and argue that other factors, or different ones, must be considered. Other experts would agree with these few concepts, but they would provide more detailed explanations, perhaps more than what is needed to help others.

Human behavior is extremely complex. We may never know in our lifetime all the principles that might apply. In addition, we know that each individual is unique. An individual's experiences in life influence how one behaves and that complicates our general understanding. Still, there appears to be some general guidelines or principles which can help us understand more about the nature of human behavior and give us some direction in our work.

Principles of Human Behavior

The following eight principles of human behavior were selected from several studies which were outlined and described by Myrick and Erney (1978). They provide a foundation for peer helpers and their work. They may give you more insight, understanding, and patience. They also can be used as a starting place when planning for change in yourself and in others. Behind all the helping methods and strategies lie these basic premises.

1. We all have basic needs.
2. Everything we do is directed to goals.
3. Our self-concepts influence all our behaviors.
4. Our self-concepts are learned and can change.
5. Our self-concepts are influenced by the consequences of what we do.
6. We are always learning and changing.
7. Increased self-awareness leads to responsible decision-making.
8. We learn from each other.

Let's look at these principles in greater detail.

Principle 1: We all have basic needs.

In order for us to have a sense of well-being and to experience some degree of success, there are several basic needs that must be met. When these needs are not satisfied, we do not function well. When these needs are satisfied, our productivity, personal development, relationships with others, and general health are enhanced. The most obvious needs are those of food, water, elimination, sleep, and shelter. These human needs are necessary in daily living and we often take them for granted. To these we might add the following which also have been identified as essential.

The need to be loved and accepted. We all want to be accepted as we are. While we are similar to others in many ways, still we feel unique and we want this uniqueness appreciated by others. It is both frustrating and disappointing when we are accepted only if we please others. There is a warmth and strength that is beneficial to us when we experience an unconditional love.

The need for security. We learn and function best in situations where we feel safe and free from threat. It is not fun, for example, to be in a group where we are afraid that what we say might be ridiculed, or where we feel secure only if our work is mistake-proof. For fear of making a mistake, some people develop a shell around themselves in which none, or very few, are allowed to enter. Such a shell provides protection that gives a sense of comfort, even if it is limiting and prevents them from reaching out and enjoying new experiences. On the other hand, when they no longer need the shell and feel secure from threatening forces, there is a special joy in living.

The need to belong. There is in each of us a need to belong to some type of group. To be a part of a group gives us a sense of identity. It helps us feel accepted and often provides the type of support that is needed to help reduce anxiety. For example, there are some people who, upon arriving at work, immediately go to a favorite meeting place where they can converse with their friends. They find security and a sense of identity by talking with the group. "Hey, what's happening?" is answered in a way that communicates understanding, a shared interest, and acceptance. People also seek membership in formal organized groups, such as athletic teams, social clubs, music groups, and civic groups, that also provide a source of identity and a sense of belonging.

The need to be independent, to take responsibility, and to make choices. One of our needs is to feel in control of our lives. This emotional experience of feeling in charge—of being able to be ourselves and to not be a puppet on a string—is important. When this need is thwarted, we become devious, manipulative, self-sacrificing, and defensive.

Principle 2: Everything we do is directed to goals.

We want to maintain and enhance our personal survival. Survival characterizes the essence of all living things. For instance, a plant will turn its leaves toward the sun and its root system will grow toward water. This is much more evident when there is only a limited amount of water and sun available. Survival plays the central role in learning and behavior.

We spend most of our lives trying to maximize our pleasure and minimize our discomfort. If this seems too simple, apply it to your own life. You tend to do those things most often that bring you some type of pleasure or reward. You try to avoid pain, whether it is physical or psychological. You will protect your physical self and you frequently take precautions to avoid getting hurt. The same principle is also true of your psychological self.

It is important to remember that we not only change ourselves to help us survive physically, but we will change our behavior and make decisions that increase opportunities for the "psychological-self" to survive. We all hold certain attitudes, ideas, and perceptions about ourselves. These thoughts are organized and generally consistent. They persist over a long time and the term self-concept is applied to them.

Principle 3: Our self-concepts influence all our behaviors.

We all have some type of self-picture. This picture might best be described as I or me. It is this self-image or self-concept that determines our behavior. No other person will ever come to know us the way we know ourselves. It is through our self-concepts that we perceive the world. We feel..., we think..., and we act, based upon our perceptions.

Your self-concept can be composed of many forms: I am—your general nature; I can—your abilities; I should or should not—your beliefs and attitudes; I want to be—your aspirations and desires. You will behave in certain ways, depending upon how you see yourself. When you act in a way that is generally not your usual custom, or contrary to the way you would like to be, then the experience is an unpleasant one and you may begin to feel defensive, inadequate, insecure, and even worthless.

Principle 4: Our self-concepts are learned and can change.

Self-concepts are learned and can change, although change is usually slow, most often tedious, and sometimes painful. Once a self-concept becomes consistent, it is most difficult to change because change brings threat, anxiety, and fear of self-destruction. Yet, people can and do change. By using the facilitative model effectively, you can help people make positive changes.

Some experiences which affect the self-concept can be attributed to genetic and hereditary factors (e.g. physical size, color of skin, hair texture, and general physical features). We are also greatly influenced by the culture or the environment in which we live. Two children growing up in two different parts of the world—or even in the same family—might behave differently because their unique genetic make-ups, environments, and experiences have influenced their development and belief systems. Each has a self-picture and behaves accordingly.

Principle 5: Our self-concepts are influenced by the consequences of what we do.

Rewards and punishments play an important part in determining how consistent we behave and how we learn. We do those things that enhance our self-images. For example, if talking tough and getting into fights is part of how a boy sees himself—a la Rambo style—then that will be a part of his behavior. Or if being a scholar and investigating certain scientific hypotheses—a la Dr.Salk—then he will spend a lot of time in research activities.

Much of what we do is shaped by our past and our immediate experiences, but perhaps nothing influences the development of our self more than the consequences of our behavior. If the consequences are satisfying and rewarding, then it is likely that those behaviors will occur again. A pattern or a habit may even be formed. On the other hand, if our behavior is ineffective and plays little or no part in meeting our basic needs, or enhancing our survival, then it is likely to be disregarded and not become a part of our personal style.

Perception determines our reality and behavior. One of the interesting findings in the study of human behavior is that "reality" is influenced by self-concept. What is reality?

Suppose we were to show you a five-minute film and then ask you and others in your group to describe what happened. In a short time you would soon realize that your perception, while similar in many respects, might be slightly different from the others. Such variance in perception, for example, has made it difficult for witnesses in a criminal case to provide an accurate picture of what happened. How we see things determines how we behave. The question is how do we see things?

Principle 6: We are always learning and changing.

Learning is not limited to classrooms. Learning is going on continually in your life. When you are not reading this book, for example, you are still learning by watching, listening, talking with others—as well as interacting with your surroundings.

Learning is more than gathering and memorizing facts. It is more than learning information in a formal educational setting. It is the very act of living and surviving.

Although we can see some very consistent patterns about our personality—and although some enduring personality patterns are formed before ten years of age—nevertheless, we are always in a state of change. We are always moving to something else. We can and do change, but change takes time. Although we want immediate changes, still change can be slow.

Principle 7: Increased self-awareness leads to responsible decision-making.

Through increased self-awareness, we can learn to resolve our problems at a more conscious level and to take more responsibility for solving them. If we have a sense of self-awareness, we have more understanding of the factors that influence us when we make a decision.

If we lack this sense of self-awareness, we may catch ourselves alibiing, failing to take a stand, or being unwilling to accept the consequences of our behavior. The ultimate responsibility for making choices and living with them rests with us, as individuals. We cannot live a life for another person.

Principle 8: We learn from each other.

Most of our learning about life comes through interacting with others, whether it be through direct personal contact or through reading what others are thinking. People provide us with rewards or punishments. They help us form relationships that are important in our daily lives. They serve as models, whose behaviors we incorporate or reject. Without other people, learning is limited and would be bland, narrow, and unimaginative.

If we are going to help people become more responsible for themselves and to help them feel more adequate, worthy, and positive, we need to make a special effort to understand them. This means that we must accept their attitudes as part of them, not that we necessarily agree with those attitudes or behaviors. It also means that if we are going to facilitate people to change, we cannot do it by pushing our world onto them and forcing them to agree with our perceptions and decisions.

Summary

The facilitative approach to helping puts a premium on understanding the nature of people and trying to appreciate the uniqueness of the individuals with whom we work. It emphasizes that change comes about best when others gain insight through their own experiences, rather than through our experiences. It means helping others to explore their worlds, so they might learn who they are, what they want out of life, and what they are trying to do to get it. It is this self-exploration that is central in the helping process.

Chapter 3

Relating

People need people who care about them. There is an increasing number of articles and books being written which describe how people in our society feel alienated or apart from one another. While each of us might have a pool of acquaintances that ranges from 500 to 2,500 people, most of us have fewer than twenty friends whom we rely upon for close communication. The average American couple today has close friendships with about seven people. Although you may know someone with whom you discuss various personal matters, that person may not possess facilitative characteristics or skills.

Relationships of all kinds are encountering stress and strain and they are becoming shorter in duration. It has been suggested that most people are not sufficiently involved with others to satisfy their basic needs. More and more, people are leading fragmented lives and are having trouble communicating with others. All interpersonal relationships can be improved by understanding and using the factors that facilitate communication and personal growth.

Unfortunately, in our society there is a tendency for relationships to be too impersonal or task-oriented. Studies of effective and ineffective teachers, for example, have indicated that those teachers who have a more personal relationship with their students tend to have a more positive impact. On the other hand, those teachers who have taken less of a personal interest in their students, although they may be well-prepared academically, tend to be less effective. No matter how knowledgeable you may be of human behavior, or how many academic degrees you have, or your sex, or your age, or your experience, the real heart of the helping process is the quality of the relationship.

The ability to create a helping relationship does not belong exclusively to professional practitioners, such as counselors, therapists, or doctors. Peer helpers—people who are not professionally trained, but who foster the facilitative conditions and use facilitative skills—can and do facilitate personal growth in others. What are the conditions that are essential for a helping relationship?

The Facilitative Conditions

Think of a group in which you were a member and in which the leader had a positive impact upon you and the group. What words or phrases best describe that person? Now, think of a group where the leader was ineffective. What words or phrases best describe that person?

Persons who have positive impacts are usually described as sensitive, understanding, and open. Ineffective leaders are often described as judgmental, unaccepting, sarcastic, cold, or distant. We also know that attitudes and behaviors are changed very little by advice, persuasion, or threats. People experience the most growth when they are in the presence of a person who is positive, accepting, tolerant, easy to talk with, and caring. If you want to be perceived as a person who is described by your group as helpful and as having a positive impact, what do you need to do?

If you are seen as a friendly and caring person, then others are more likely to be drawn to you. If they also experience you as a person who is respectful, understanding, trustworthy, and interested in what they are thinking and feeling, then they will tell you more about themselves and explore ideas and choices with you. A personal working relationship can be established.

We have selected five characteristics that, if you incorporate them into your personal life and style of helping, they will make you more facilitative. These are: 1) Caring commitment; 2) Accepting; 3) Understanding; 4) Trusting openness; and 5) Respecting.

Caring commitment

A peer helper must demonstrate some degree of caring. This caring is often described as personal involvement. Involvement is further influenced by the degree to which you are committed to help and to take action. The full benefit of the facilitative process can only take place when people are committed to working together on something. This commitment might be focused on developing or building a house, a model airplane, a garden, a gourmet dinner, or a helping relationship.

Being personally involved and committed is a caring act. It does not mean that you must let others dominate your life, to the point of sacrificing your own interests and goals. It does mean, however, that you care enough to willingly give some focused energy and time to someone else. Without a caring commitment on your part, the helping relationship lacks direction and bogs down. Without a caring commitment, you will experience boredom and fatigue. The facilitative process requires your commitment or it could easily drift and miss its mark.

To care for others and to work with them as a peer helper requires that you shift the focus away from your own needs and interests to those who you are helping. Self-centeredness is a powerful enemy to any facilitator. Being a peer helper requires a servant heart—a caring for those you have accepted the responsibility to help.

Accepting

Accepting is recognizing that others have a right to their feelings, although you may not approve of their behaviors. It emphasizes the personal worth and dignity of a person, despite the circumstances. Being accepting of others assumes that they are doing the best they can to get along in their lives and to satisfy their basic needs. If they could do any better, they would. It is important to remember, however, that acceptance, as part of the helping conditions, is not the same as approving of people's actions or agreeing with them. Moreover, it does not mean that you are encouraging them to continue doing what they have been doing.

Being an accepting person is not an easy thing to do, especially when you see others as being very different from yourself. Generally, there is a natural tendency to reject or ignore those who are different. When the difference becomes apparent, there is also a tendency to criticize, find fault, condemn, or belittle. Instead of curiosity and the desire to learn more about the person, we often become defensive. It is as though the person is threatening our own existence or meaning in life. Thus, our own self-concept and self-esteem influences how much we can accept others. Training in the facilitative skills can play an important part in being more accepting of others. Accepting leads to understanding, another critical condition in the helping process.

Understanding

What do caring helpers do as they listen to others tell about their situations, interests, ideas, or problems? Attentive listening, of course, is essential. But, even the most willing listeners will have difficulty helping others, unless they selectively tune into what is being said and how it is said. Facilitative helpers are interested in understanding people.

When you are an understanding person, you are grasping what the person is talking about; but more important, you are also sensing what the person is feeling and experiencing. While you are understanding, you avoid labeling, judging, and evaluating. You are too busy "being with the person." You are trying to see things from the other person's point of view. As some have suggested, you are trying to put yourself in the other person's shoes. But, understanding is more than that. You must guard against projecting your own feelings onto a situation, assuming you know what the person is feeling because that is what you would feel. When you are being understanding, you recognize and reflect the feelings, including the thoughts, that others are experiencing.

Empathy is a word that is sometimes used as a substitute for the word understanding. It implies that you have heard the ideas expressed and the story that was told. It also implies that you can identify the feelings that were present. Tuning into others, their feelings, and their thoughts, brings about a closeness which enables you to know them better.

When you are understanding, or empathic, you are sensitive to a person's words and the feelings that complement those words. In everyday living, the pace is so fast that few people experience the joy of knowning that they have been understood when they are sharing their ideas. They assume others are understanding, but this may not be true.

As a peer helper, you will want to tune into others and to understand their basic needs and interests. When they seek you out for assistance, you will try to be sensitive to what is going on behind the words. As you become more understanding, you can begin to help people develop plans for meeting their needs and goals.

Trusting openness

As people experience the conditions of caring commitment, accepting, and understanding, they gain a sense of security and confidence. They can take more risks; they can explore more ideas without fear of being judged or devalued. An openness is fostered that invites self-disclosure. There is an air of trustworthiness that adds energy to the helping process.

Being a trustworthy helper means that you will not use what you have learned about people to hurt them. You are concerned about their welfare and you act in their best interests. A trustworthy person is someone who can be trusted with ideas and feelings. However, there are occasions when you cannot remain totally confidential about matters. As a peer helper, you are neither granted privileged communication nor are you free from legal responsibilities.

While you can respect someone's wishes for confidentiality, it is not something that peer helpers can give unequivocally. There are limitations. For example, if someone were to talk about planning to do injury to someone else and it appeared that this threat was real, then it would be your duty to inform some authority who could intervene in a responsible way. The key to being trustworthy is being open and honest, as well as being respectful of a person's welfare.

People talk about matters openly with those they trust. As trust builds with a person or group, there is more sharing of information, ideas, and feelings. The sharing expands the base upon which you interact and relate with others. There is an increased awareness of self and others, which can lead to effective decision-making and problem-solving.

There was a time when helpers were told that they should not reveal their own personal ideas, feelings, and values. In reality, everything you do while you are with others in some way reveals something about yourself. Your choice of words, for example, may suggest what you are feeling and thinking. Your dress, mannerisms, and posture are also revealing of what you value. They all make an impression on the person you are helping.

If you choose to disclose something about yourself, perhaps something you experienced or how you tend to view something, you might cut across some of the differences between you. This might be particularly true as you begin working with others who have different backgrounds from your own. Sharing similar ideas and events in your life can encourage personal closeness. But, the most important element in self-disclosure is that of sharing feelings.

The appropriateness, timeliness, and extent of your own self-disclosures should depend on your purpose and your best judgment. Sharing some things about yourself can be helpful, as long as you are aware of your responsibilities, tasks, and goals as a peer helper. Before self-disclosing, you might ask yourself this question: Who is the person being helped and who is the helper?

Respecting

People who are respectful of others give them common courtesies, including the right to express their own ideas and feelings, to be responsible for their own decisions, to solve their own problems, and to shape their own lives. Protecting someone's privacy and honoring the desire for some confidentiality is also an act of respect. Respect conveys a friendliness and warmth which is encouraging.

When people feel respected, they are more likely to share their ideas and to talk more openly about matters. They know that their contributions will be acknowledged and that they will not be "put down" for their efforts. Many people in society are treated as stereotypes, ignoring their individuality. Racist and sexist slurs show disregard for people. Likewise, peer helpers who gossip, who brag openly about their work, or who make negative comments about others, do not show respect.

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Summary

Building a close working relationship is the first consideration of any helping process. Some conditions are essential in a helping relationship: 1) Caring commitment; 2) Accepting; 3) Understanding; 4) Trusting openness; and 5) Respecting. These characteristics tend to emerge when facilitative skills are used.

Learning and appropriately applying the skills featured in the following chapters will reflect your caring, acceptance, understanding, trusting openness, and respect.

Chapter 4

Listening

Listening seems easy enough to do, as most of us listen to television, radio, colleagues, spouses, friends, and various noises every day. You might be thinking, "I've been a listener all my life. I know how to listen. Where I need help is getting others to listen to me." One of the best ways to get others to listen to you is to first be an attentive listener to them.

Think about the different conversations that you have had today. While you were talking, how many people do you think really heard what you were saying? How many were sincerely interested in trying to communicate with you? What would they say if they tried to tell others about your conversation with them? How would they describe your feelings? Did they hear you, or did they only hear what they wanted to hear?

Seldom do we get an opportunity to talk with people who take time to listen to us, who follow our ideas, and who encourage us to talk in greater depth. Most people appear to be caught up in their own thoughts or they are worried about the impression they are making. They are too busy with their own thoughts to be effective listeners. Or if they try to listen, they sometimes lack the patience to hear us out. They often interrupt and interject their own ideas. They shift the focus of the conversation, either consciously or unconsciously, to themselves and we are not encouraged to explore our ideas to any length. Conversations, consequently, are often superficial, shallow, or of only passing interest. Sometimes the social game is more important than having a meaningful discussion where important personal issues are examined.

If you are a careful and attentive listener, you will avoid jumping in or interrupting, taking the focus away from what is being said. You will avoid being preoccupied or anticipating what might be said. Rather than let your mind wander, you focus on the talker's thoughts and feelings.

Good listening is not a passive act. You do not sit back and relax, quietly waiting your turn. To the contrary, good listening is an active process where you are working at understanding what the person is saying. Skilled listeners do not let their own needs, values, and beliefs interfere. They restrict their needs and remarks, in order to give others a chance to share their thoughts. They patiently encourage others to tell their stories in their own ways.

Following the lead of the talker requires practice. You not only listen to the words, but you focus on what is being communicated through posture, gestures, facial expressions, and other physical behavior that goes with the words. You observe body language and take it into consideration, along with the words that were spoken. You might ask yourself: "What is the message here? What is the person really saying? How was the person feeling then? How is the person feeling here and now?"

When was the last time you took stock of your own listening habits? Do you get involved in a conversation, encouraging others to express themselves? Do you find others boring? Do other people, after having talked with you, leave thinking that you have listened to them? Do they believe that you cared about what they had to say? Do they leave feeling understood?

Peer helpers need to be good listeners. When you take time to listen to someone—really listen to someone—it is one of the most caring events a person can experience. If you can help people feel that their ideas are important and that you are interested in what they are talking about, then you can provide a meaningful life experience. You add to others personal worth and sense of well-being.

Four Steps for Attentive Listening

How can you become a better listener? A few simple steps (Myrick & Bowman, 1981) which can make a difference in peer helping are:

1. Look at the person who is talking.
2. Pay attention to the words.
3. Be aware of the feelings that go with the words.
4. Say something to show that you are listening.

Let's take a closer look at these steps.

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1. Look at the person who is talking.

Assuming a comfortable and relaxed position invites people to talk, especially if you maintain eye contact while listening to them. You can turn away and still hear someone talk, but listening and understanding what is being said is much easier if you look directly at the person. Put yourself in a position where you can see the person's face and take notice of gestures and nonverbal communication. You can use your eyes—and your ears—to learn.

Your eyes communicate a lot to people. They emphasize how interested you are in them. They reflect your reactions. They give them clues about what you are thinking and feeling. In brief, your eyes not only say that you are attending to the person, but they communicate a lot about you.

2. Pay attention to the words.

As you listen to a person talk, many things might come to mind. Try to avoid drifting off into your own thoughts, or daydreaming. This is a common problem for many helpers. Restrain your own needs to get ahead, to anticipate what will be said, and to reach premature conclusions. Take a close look at yourself to see if you have any irritating habits, such as finishing people's sentences or filling in words for them when they hesitate. Have some patience and give people time to tell you what they are thinking. Let them be the center of attention.

As a person speaks, listen to the words that convey an idea or describe an event. The story being shared is a personal perspective of an idea or event. As you attend to the person, you might listen for some common themes or ideas. You might take note of key words which capture what is being said. When the person is finished talking, you should be able to summarize the main ideas. The person who was talking might say, "Yes, that's what I was trying to say!" or, "No, that's not it." Then you have to hear the story again, if the person has the need and patience to tell you.

3. Be aware of the feelings that go with the words.

It is impossible not to have feelings when you express yourself. Ideas are always complimented by feelings, either pleasant or unpleasant.

Beginning helpers often hear only the spoken words and miss the feelings that are also communicated. Feelings are a natural part of people's lives and should not be ignored. To the contrary, feelings are so important that peer helpers need to listen for them. Some feelings may be easily identified because they were referred to when the story was being told. Other feelings are found behind the words, perhaps as a driving force or an emotional expression that completes the thoughts and ideas. If you want to be a careful and attentive listener, then you have to tune into feelings.

A practical way of identifying feelings is to ask: Am I hearing pleasant or unpleasant feelings with these words? Or am I hearing both kinds of feelings? This little technique will slow you down, focus your attention on what the person is experiencing, and give you a hint as to how you might respond.

A list of common pleasant and unpleasant feelings follow. Examine the list and familiarize yourself with them. What other words would you add? Which ones seem strange to you?

Unpleasant Feelings Words

Abandoned	Distraught	Left Out	Sad
Agony	Disturbed	Lonely	Scared
Ambivalent	Dominated	Longing	Shocked
Angry	Divided	Low	Skeptical
Annoyed	Dubious	Mad	Sorrowful
Anxious	Empty	Maudlin	Startled
Betrayed	Envious	Mean	Strained
Bitter	Exasperated	Melancholy	Stupid
Bored	Exhausted	Miserable	Stunned
Burdened	Fatigued	Nervous	Tenuous
Cheated	Fearful	Odd	Tense
Cold	Flustered	Overwhelmed	Threatened
Condemned	Foolish	Pain	Tired
Confused	Frantic	Panicked	Trapped
Crushed	Frustrated	Persecuted	Troubled
Defeated	Frightened	Petrified	Uneasy
Despair	Grief	Pity	Unsettled
Destructive	Guilty	Pressured	Vulnerable
Different	Intimidated	Quarrelsome	Weak
Diminished	Irritated	Rejected	Weepy
Discontented	Isolated	Remorse	Worried
Distracted	Jealous	Restless	

Pleasant Feeling Words

Adequate	Delighted	Generous	Loved
Affectionate	Determined	Glad	Peaceful
Befriended	Eager	Gratified	Pleasant
Bold	Ecstatic	Groovy	Pleased
Calm	Enchanted	Happy	Proud
Capable	Enhanced	Helpful	Refreshed
Caring	Energetic	High	Relaxed
Challenged	Enervated	Honored	Relieved
Charmed	Enjoyed	Important	Rewarded
Cheerful	Excited	Impressed	Safe
Clever	Fascinated	Infatuated	Satisfied
Comforting	Fearless	Inspired	Secure
Confident	Free	Joyful	Settled
Content	Fulfilled	Kind	Sure
		Loving	Warm

If it helps, think of different situations in your everyday life and try to imagine the feelings that you expect would be present. For instance, suppose that someone has noticed that your shirt or blouse has a stain on it, of which you were unaware, and has brought it to your attention. Or imagine that you received a letter from a secret admirer. What if you worked on a puzzling piece of work for several hours more than you expected and were still not finished? How might you feel in these situations? Next, you might think of situations in which you will be a peer helper. What are some typical kinds of feelings that might be present, both pleasant and unpleasant?

Knowing more about pleasant and unpleasant feeling words, perhaps expanding your vocabulary, helps you to be more sensitive and responsive to others. Effective facilitators and helpers use feeling words more precisely than others. In addition, it is also evident that feelings and behaviors are closely related. People behave, for better or for worse, out of their feelings. The way in which people act or behave also influences their own feelings, and the feelings and behaviors of others.

4. Say something to show that you are listening.

The person whom you are helping will not know that you are listening, unless you say something to show it. It is not enough to say, "I know what you mean." Or "I know how you feel." These general statements might be comforting to a few, but most people want more evidence that you really heard them. This is where facilitative helpers make a difference.

Careful and attentive listeners have something to say when it is their turn to talk. First, they do not change the subject, unless it is important to redirect or refocus the topic. Second, they periodically check out what they think they are hearing, interrupting if necessary to confirm that they are tuning into thoughts and feelings. They make a conscious effort to let the other person know that they are listening—both to the story (facts, events, ideas, or general story) and to the feelings that go with the content (pleasant, unpleasant, or both).

Look at the example below.

Jerry:
I know that the tryouts for the soccer team will be tomorrow, but I'm not sure I should go. I'll probably never make the team anyway.

Peer Helper:
You like the idea of playing soccer, but are unsure if you want to go to the tryouts.

Jerry:
Yeah, I keep giving myself little pep talks, but I know I'll panic and screw up when I get there.

Peel Helper:
You want to tryout, but are afraid that you'll embarrass yourself. You seem to be in a bind.

Jerry:
I'm not really sure it's worth it. But, then again, I know that I'm better than some guys.

Peer Helper:
How would you compare yourself to some of the others who will be trying out?

In this example, the peer helper used short empathic responses to emphasize Jerry's feelings. It appeared that his unpleasant feelings were overpowering any pleasant feelings he may have for the soccer team tryouts and that they were upper most in his thoughts. Therefore, good listening required the peer helper to focus on those feelings and later to encourage Jerry to explore his thoughts and feelings more.

It is refreshing to find someone who not only hears our story, but who attends to what we are experiencing, and responds to our feelings. When you respond to feelings and ideas, you not only emphasize the fact that you are hearing, but you engage the other person in a facilitative process where more awareness can occur, decisions and alternatives can be considered, and actions planned.

Summary

People seldom get an opportunity to talk with someone who will take time to listen, who will follow their ideas, or who will encourage them to talk in greater depth. Following four simple steps: 1) look at the person who is talking; 2) pay attention to the words; 3) be aware of the feelings that go with the words; and 4) say something to show that you are listening, will improve your listening skills. This type of listening is part of the facilitative process and it is a major task of peer helpers.

Chapter 5

Responding

There is no doubt that your careful observation and listening are needed in peer helping. But, now it is your turn to say something, to show that you have been listening. What will you say? The answer to that question will depend upon what you hear and see as you work with someone in a helping relationship.

Certainly nonverbal behavior plays a role in what is communicated, but most of the time we respond to what people say to us. Our words reflect attitudes and feelings as much as they convey our ideas. A few carefully chosen words can communicate an invitation to talk more, to explore, and to discover. Whereas, ill-chosen words tend to push people away, threaten relationships, and impede learning. Peer helpers know how to respond to others in a facilitative way.

Peer helpers are aware that the choice of words or the turn of a phrase can make significant differences in helping relationships. There are no set speeches to give. There are no words of wisdom or specific statements to offer. After careful and attentive listening, peer helpers try to couch their thoughts and words in facilitative responses.

The facilitative model has been referred to and described in other books (e.g. Myrick, 1987). This model can provide you with some guidelines. It is a practical approach to responding to others in helping relationships. Generally, there are six high facilitative responses that you will want to use frequently in your work. You may also want to be aware there are other responses which may be helpful occasionally, but they are considered low-facilitative.

High Facilitative Responses

There are many things you can say. Some responses, however, are more facilitative than others. A few have been identified as high facilitative because they communicate understanding; they help foster the conditions most desired in a helping relationship; and they encourage people to become more aware of themselves and others. The high facilitative responses are essential in peer helping. They are:

1. Feeling-focused responses
2. Clarifying and summarizing
3. Open-ended questions
4. Acknowledging
5. Linking
6. Complimenting and confronting

Feeling-focused responses

The feeling-focused response requires you to be sensitive to the person's feelings, and to say something that focuses on a feeling, pleasant or unpleasant, that you heard. You need not respond to all the feelings that were expressed. But, a feeling word which captures part of what the person was experiencing must be included to get credit for this type of response. It is the premiere response for communicating understanding.

Although the feeling-focused response is one of the highest facilitative responses that you can make to others, it is seldom used in everyday conversation. Studies indicate that less than one out of a thousand times will a feeling response be made to a person's statement. This is also true in many helping professions, such as nursing, teaching, or social work. In the general scheme of life, feeling-focused responses are uncommon. Many people, therefore, complain that nobody understands them. They feel lonely and even alienated. Some, in defense of themselves, become skeptics or take on negative attitudes about others, which results in unsatisfying relationships.

If you listen carefully for feelings and respond to them as a peer helper, people will perceive you as someone who cares about them and who is interested in what they are experiencing. They will feel more comfortable and relaxed with you. They will trust you more and they will begin to see you as someone who can help them.

Here are a few examples of feeling-focused responses:

"You're really angry, John, and not sure what to do next."
"Rachel, you appear to be confused."
"That was exciting for you."
"You're feeling more relaxed now."
"It still hurts to think about it."

Some writers have described this type of response as "reflecting understanding." There is a feeling of being un-

derstood when someone else responds to the essence of your feelings. When you echo someone else's feelings, which may or may not be expressed overtly, you are following the person's lead and entering that person's world.

The disclosure of one's feelings has not always been viewed as a facilitative thing to do. For many years in our society, feelings were considered to be private matters and to be guarded. Some people still think that their feelings should not be shared or discussed. They may try to deny them for fear that some of their feelings would reveal a weak character or a personality problem. Such a position makes it difficult to form close personal relationships. Without a focus on feelings, communication is too formal, restricted, stiff, and impersonal. Many of the problems in society are due to a lack of understanding—a lack of expressing feelings which are related to behavior. Sometimes, repressing feelings or failing to talk about feelings are steps toward personal dysfunctioning and unproductive relationships.

For some people, the feeling-focused response may be difficult to learn. The response involves more than a restatement of words or paraphrasing. It is not to be confused with clarifying or summarizing ideas or events. Nor is the response to be confused with an interpretation, which attempts an explanation of what is causing a feeling or action. Rather, feeling-focused responses emphasize what the person is experiencing. The focus is on pleasant, unpleasant, or both kinds of feelings. One or more of these feelings may have been stated in the person's words to you. Other feelings may be present, but they were not expressed openly. Your task is to identify and respond to them, communicating your sincere interest to understand.

You may have heard the question: "Can you put yourself in their shoes?" This old adage suggests that by doing so you will know what they are experiencing—feeling. Another question that sometimes is posed is: "How would you feel if you did or said something like that?" Sometimes the answers can give you a clue to understanding, but they can

also lead you astray. Be aware that the answers you provide might be a projection of your own feelings and may be unrelated to their feelings. We often assume others experience the same things we do in similar situations, when this may not be true.

Moreover, it is insufficient to identify feelings if you say nothing to show your understanding. To say simply, "I know what you feel," or "I understand what you are going through," are not feeling-focused responses. Neither of these statements communicate understanding. They might be perceived as reassurance, perhaps providing some comfort. But, without a focus on feeling words to emphasize your understanding, they will probably miss the mark and could even be seen as shallow, condescending remarks.

To begin a sentence with "I feel" or "You feel" does not always mean that you will focus on a person's feelings. For instance, "I feel you'd make a good president of the group" is not a feeling-focused response. It is an opinion. It might be restated, "You seem uncertain and wonder if you would make a good president of the group." This gives attention to what the person is thinking and experiencing, with the first part focusing on the feeling and the second part focusing on the idea or topic. To receive any credit for a feeling-focused response, feeling words (pleasant or unpleasant) must be in your response.

Feeling-focused responses both communicate understanding and help create the facilitative conditions. They have a lot of personal power. There is no need to immediately follow with another statement. In peer helping, let the impact of focusing on feelings stand alone. Pause. Give the person an opportunity to reflect on your statement. If you are accurate, the person will usually nod positively and continue to talk. The moment of understanding is often a bonding one and a pleasant experience for both of you.

In addition to the cues you receive from what people say, you should also tune into their feelings by observing their nonverbal and extra-verbal behavior. It is always taking

place between people. Such communication comes through tone of voice, the speed of speech, pauses, and hesitations. It includes stammering, stuttering, and stumbling, as well as exaggerated emphasis on words or facial expressions. Gestures and other body movements also convey meaning. A turn of the lip, a frown, a grinding of teeth, a rolling of eyes, or a tapping of fingers can provide clues about what a person is thinking and feeling.

While body language has been a subject of study for many years, there is no reliable reference book that analyzes or explains this type of language. Therefore, interpreting nonverbal behavior should be done with caution, if at all. It is too easy to be misled by dress, postures, and other appearances. No doubt they are a part of the person's total experience, perhaps what the person is thinking or feeling. Taken out of context or isolated as a symbol of what a person believes and thinks, they may be inadequate and irrelevant.

If you are looking for a key to being a more effective helper, then begin by increasing your feeling word vocabulary. This enables you to be more sensitive and to respond more accurately to what people say and do. Be as precise as you can, choosing the best word to reflect the person's feeling.

There are many feeling words that are closely related. Sometimes you might choose one that captures a shade of the basic emotion (e.g. "You're annoyed," instead of "You're mad." It acknowledges the unpleasant experience and it may not evoke as much defensiveness as some words which are less socially accepted. If you are wrong, or if people want to use even stronger words to emphasize their emotions, then you can substitute or add another word.

Making a feeling-focused response, even when it is not exactly on target, will get you credit for being a caring person. You are trying, and most people appreciate the effort. You can always be corrected. Meanwhile, your attempt emphasizes how much you want to understand. You can hardly lose when you make feeling-focused responses. Even when

corrected, if not accurate, your effort puts you in closer communication with the other person and your understanding is enhanced.

It is possible that your focus on a feeling could be rejected or denied, even though you believe you are accurate. Sometimes responding accurately to feelings can be a little threatening. Some people, for instance, become uneasy when they realize that they are revealing so much of themselves. This is especially true when they are insecure, cautious, and doubtful of others.

Helping others to develop feeling word vocabularies is just as important as teaching them some decision-making and problem-solving strategies. Individuals cannot talk or behave without showing feeling. Both their verbal and nonverbal behaviors reveal these feelings. Many people are unaware of their feelings or have ignored or suppressed them. "Don't get emotional" is an expression that many of us have heard, especially when trying to make a decision or to solve a problem. The assumption is that logical and clear-headed thinking is without personal feelings. This is nonsense.

Feelings have a powerful influence on behavior. Feelings are a part of living. Yet, we all know people who are so unresponsive to their environment that the scope of their feelings is limited. These unfeeling people are very dysfunctioning. If a person is without feeling, more extensive and professional help is probably needed. The person should be referred to a doctor or mental health professional.

People experience many kinds of feelings during a day. They take some routine events in stride, while others are unsettling. Generally, there is a very low level of awareness of feelings, as thoughts and images seem to take precedence in most situations. Responding to feelings increases awareness, which is related to responsible decision-making and problem-solving.

Clarifying or summarizing responses

If you are like most listeners, when a person is talking you attend to the events or the ideas that are being talked about. They are the basis of the conversation and provide the framework for a discussion. Although emotion is being expressed, the thoughts and the story that are being communicated must also be understood. After listening, you may want to respond by clarifying a significant theme or summarizing some ideas that you heard expressed. For instance:

"You have made your plans."
"Let's see then, you plan to enter the military service."
"You and your friends disagree about what you should do."

Clarifying or summarizing responses focus on basic ideas or events. When so much is being said in a free-flowing conversation, many things are communicated. One statement might express a key idea, such as plans for getting a job, while other statements support the idea. Sometimes the person who is talking will veer off course and begin talking about something else, maybe introducing more key thoughts, which may or may not be relevant to the first idea expressed. Being an attentive listener is not an easy job, especially when a person is rambling along about many things.

It can be helpful to make a clarifying or summarizing response when you: a) are not sure if you are following the person's train of thought; b) are not sure if you heard something correctly; or c) want to draw attention or emphasize something that was said. Such responses focus on the content of the discussion or the events of the story. There is no attempt to use feeling words, although feelings may have been heard when the ideas were expressed.

As you try to focus the conversation or highlight a few ideas, use fresh words when you clarify or summarize. This avoids parroting. You can use some of the same words, but turn the words and phrases around, unless you deliberately want to repeat the phrasing for emphasis. Some people have referred to this type of statement as paraphrasing, which is a rewording of a written or spoken message.

When used at appropriate moments, clarifying or summarizing responses communicate that you are interested in following the thoughts that people are expressing and that you want to know more. These responses also give people an opportunity to hear their ideas and to think more about what they have said. In a sense, they provide a focus to the discussion, almost serving as a checklist of ideas that are receiving attention.

If you have misunderstood, the person to whom you are talking can correct you or add information that could increase your knowledge. Then, you are back on track and can again follow the lead of the person as the story continues.

Unfortunately, the clarifying and summarizing responses have been spoofed by a few people who associate them with a lack of genuineness. They might think that you are using a phony technique by mirroring back ideas, especially when they hear some typical lead in phrases such as:

"If I hear you correctly...."
"You seem to be saying...."
"If I am following you, you are saying...."
"In other words, you are trying to...."
"Correct me if I'm wrong, but you're saying...."
"I heard these key ideas, I)...."
"Let me see if I understand, you said...."
"What is emerging from all that you said is...."
"Let's see, you are thinking that...."

There is nothing wrong with such introductory phrases. In fact, they can be useful. They alert the person that you are trying to focus the conversation. They also provide a little "wiggle room" or a simple qualification of what you are planning to clarify or summarize. Moreover, they can provide a lead-in for you as you attempt to focus and express your own thoughts.

Suppose that someone came to you and began talking about an examination which was to be given soon. You might respond to the person's feelings (e.g. "You're worried about the exam"; "It makes you uneasy and nervous to think about it.") You might clarify or summarize (e.g. "This exam is coming up soon"; "You're planning to spend tonight studying for the exam.") In both cases, you follow the lead of the individual, rather than give advice or reassuring remarks, and this facilitates more communication.

Open-ended questions

Questions are designed to obtain additional information, provoke thought, or encourage discussion. They imply that it would be beneficial to discuss the situation in more detail. They also focus the discussion. Questions not only determine the type of information collected and the extent of that information, but, just as importantly, they can determine the direction of a relationship.

Let's suppose you want to talk to someone about a problem. If you initiate the discussion through a long series of questions, you might be seen as a person with some answers. Why did you ask your questions? Did you hope they would help the person gain insight? Or did you really plan to provide a solution?

Questions can stimulate discussion. But, there are certain things that should be kept in mind when posing them:

1. What is the purpose of the question and what is the assumption behind it?
2. Are you trying to get more information or to encourage the person to elaborate?
3. Is there an alternative response that could be more effective?
4. What impact is the question going to have on the relationship?

Let's take a look at some kinds of questions.

Questions can be either open or closed. Closed questions only require simple yes or no responses. They are often experienced as a "just give me the facts" approach. On the other hand, open questions ask for more information and encourage answers with more explanation. Look at these examples:

"Do you get along with your partners?" (closed)
"What can you tell me about your partners?" (open)

"Did you talk with your secretary?" (closed)
"What did you say to your secretary?" (open)

The open question provides a broad base from which to respond. There is some leeway and how the person responds may provide valuable information. The closed question is narrow and interested in facts. Closed questions also tend to be couched in terms of your perspective, whereas open questions elicit the points of view of others.

Note the examples below. Which do you find more inviting?

"You don't like working here, do you?" (closed)
"What do you dislike about working here?" (open)

"Is this task confusing to you?" (closed)
"What is it that's confusing to you?" (open)

"Are you going to go to the concert this weekend?" (closed)
"What do you think about going to the concert this weekend? (open)

Open questions are more facilitative because they invite additional self-disclosure. They encourage people to express themselves more. Closed questions, however, also have their value, especially if you are trying to get some specific information or confirm some thoughts or facts. There will be times when you can speed up information gathering by using closed questions, if that is what you want to accomplish.

The most facilitative open questions tend to begin with "What" or "How" instead of "Why." The latter is risky since it tends to ask people to explain or justify themselves. The infamous "why" question deserves special attention.

Most people do not know the reasons they do the things they do. Yet, they might be asked, "Why did you do that?" Many people respond to such a question with a quick, "I don't know." They look away or shrug their shoulders. They feel on the spot. Look at these questions:

"Why don't you put in more time?"
"Why did you talk to him like that?"
"Why are you always late for work?"
"Why do you play your radio so loud?"
"Why didn't you talk with your boss?"

How would you feel if such questions were directed to you? What kinds of answers are possible? What kinds of impact do you think they might make on others?

We may never discover or understand all the reasons we do the things we do. A rational explanation of some things seems almost impossible. In addition, the "why" question has also come to mean something else besides a question. It is often an opinion. Look again at the preceding examples. Behind each of the questions is advice: put in more time; do not talk that way; be on time for work; turn down the radio; or talk with your boss.

When people hear the "why" in a question, they might also hear criticism. They could become defensive, even when it is a legitimate question of interest or concern. Therefore, peer helpers limit their use of this open question, knowing that it is not as productive as turning it into a "what" or "how" question. For example:

"Why didn't you come to work yesterday?"
"What made you miss work yesterday?"

"Why don't you work harder?"
"What keeps you from working harder?"

"Why don't you like your supervisor?"
"How would you describe your supervisor?"

The what and how questions are more specific and they are easier to answer. The why questions, although they may produce some insightful thought and comments, are usually less productive because they tend to elicit rationalizations and defensive postures.

Clearly the wording of a question—the way in which it is phrased or posed—can make a difference in the response that is received. Your tone of voice can also make a difference. A question is a response to someone and it communicates your values and interests.

Finally, most people say that others ask too many questions of them. Out of habit and social custom, more than anything else, it is easy to ask questions. We hear and use them more than other kinds of responses. It is also easy to fall into the trap of asking questions and then failing to listen to the answers.

Behind every question is an assumption. Therefore, questions can easily be turned into statements which tend to be either feeling-focused or clarifying responses. For example:

Open Question:
"What feelings do you have about the war?"

Statements:
"The war is on your mind a lot these days."
"You worry about the war."

Turn questions into statements to reduce the number of questions you pose and, subsequently, increase your number of high facilitative responses. This can be especially helpful if you find yourself asking a lot of questions. It is also effective to ask an open question and follow it with a feeling-focused or clarifying response. This type of interaction keeps the focus on an individual and facilitates conversation.

As you listen and work with others, increase the frequency of the high facilitative responses. They help build close working relationships.

Acknowledging

People like to be acknowledged for their contributions. They might be embarrassed or feel awkward if what they say is ignored. Therefore, a simple acknowledgement can be facilitative, especially in groups. Here are a few common and simple acknowledgements:

"Thank you for sharing that."
"Okay."
"Thanks."
"All right."

These responses, and others like them, help avoid the "plop experience," when nobody responds before moving onto someone else. It is easy enough to recognize that you heard the person without discussing or making reference to any specific ideas. In addition, such a response is effective in bringing closure to someone's comments. It acknowledges, but it does not encourage, the person to talk more—at least at that time. It is a polite way of telling a person that you are now going to move onto another topic or person.

Linking

The linking response is especially facilitative in groups. Although it could be used to refer to someone who is not present, it is particularly effective when a group leader identifies similarities (and sometimes differences) among group members. You can link events or ideas (content) that are shared between people, or you can link the feelings that they seem to have in common. For example:

"Juan and James, you both are interested in getting a job that gives you status, as well as money." (content linked)

"Juan and James, you're excited and encouraged about the potential of your new jobs." (feelings linked)

As a peer helper leading a group, you can look for opportunities to link people. Linking develops a sense of togetherness and cohesiveness. Such responses accentuate relationships, drawing common bonds and interests. They enhance the facilitative conditions of trust and acceptance, among others, and they encourage group members to talk more openly.

Complimenting and confronting

There is one additional high facilitative response to be explored: the use of feedback as a strategy for complimenting and confronting. Because of the special nature of this response and its potency for effecting change, it will be discussed in detail in a separate chapter.

Thus, the six high facilitative responses which peer helpers rely upon are:

1. Feeling-focused responses
2. Clarifying and summarizing
3. Open-ended questions
4. Acknowledging
5. Linking
6. Complimenting and confronting

Using High Facilitative Responses in Groups

Although some facilitative responses, such as linking, are obviously tailor-made for group work, it should be noted that you can use all them in a group, either responding to an individual or to the total group. You may notice, for instance, that a group member is apparently fatigued and struggling to be attentive. You might make a feeling-focused response such as, "Debbie, you're feeling tired and it's not easy to be a part of the group right now." Or if most of the group is experiencing that same fatigue, you might say, "As I look around the group, I'm sensing there is a loss of energy. We're fatigued and it's dragging us down."

Likewise, it is possible to clarify or summarize a group member's point of view. For example, "If I followed you, Nick, you think that the smoking policy should be changed." Or "Let's see now, in the past few minutes our group has suggested at least four ways in which the policy might be changed. First, one idea was...."

Questions can be directed to an individual or to the total group. While simple acknowledgements are usually made to individuals for their contributions, they could also be directed to the whole group. For instance, "This has not been an easy topic to discuss. Thanks to all of you who shared your ideas and those who patiently listened."

Compliments, which will be discussed in the next chapter, are also possible to an individual in a group or to the total group. "I was pleased and encouraged to see that we could start our group on time today, especially knowing that it was not easy for you to get here. It makes me want to get on with the meeting and make the most of our time together." To an individual, you might say something like: "Nancy, I admired the way you persisted on having your point of view heard. I'm also impressed with the way you kept your poise and calmly answered questions."

If you, as group leader, make facilitative responses to individual members as they participate in the group, it will appear as if the group members are only talking and relating to you. This can choke off communication among group members, as they try to route their comments to the group through you. Group members benefit most when they talk with one another, not just with the leader.

Eliciting the high facilitative responses from members of the group helps them become more responsive to each other. It also increases the number of helpful responses you can use to facilitate the group. For instance, you might elicit a feeling-focused response by saying something like this: "Nancy has shared a lot of things these past few minutes. Before we continue, are you (to the group) hearing pleasant or unpleasant feelings as she talks?" This would enable Nancy, in this case, to hear how others have listened to more than just her words and how they have tuned into what she was experiencing. This same type of eliciting response could also focus on helping group members clarify or summarize ideas expressed by someone. "Would someone in our group please tell us what you thought Nancy was saying? What seemed to be the key ideas?"

In the same manner, questions can also be elicited. "Who can ask Nancy a question that will help us learn more about what she's been telling us?" Or, "Okay, let's stop for a moment. What is a question that we can ask of Nancy at this point?" And, as you may have surmised by this time, you can also elicit a linking response, asking the group to comment on some of the similarities that they have noticed among members. "What feelings have you heard in our group that some of us share in common?"

Thus, you can respond to individuals within a group or to the group as a whole. You can also make the facilitative responses yourself or elicit them from group members. Or you can do both. Peer helping in groups always seems to go more smoothly, be more productive, and be less work to the leader, when you make and elicit the high facilitative responses in various combinations.

Low Facilitative Responses

While all responses—at one time or another—might be helpful, some are likely to be less facilitative than others. Three common responses that are generally considered to be low facilitative are: a) reassuring/supporting; b) analyzing/interpreting; and c) advising/evaluating. Let us see how these fit into the facilitative model.

Reassuring/supporting

Reassuring/supporting kinds of responses are intended to tell people that we believe in them. These responses are meant as encouragement, but they can easily dismiss someone's feelings and fail to be facilitative.

It is nice to have support. It feels good to be reassured, especially at times when our self-confidence is beginning to waiver. Like the other responses, reassuring and supporting statements can be helpful, if we do not rush in and deny the feeling that is there. We might inappropriately imply that the feeling is normal and so common that the person need not be concerned. For example:

"Everyone feels like that at your age."
"Things will turn out okay."
"You remind me a lot of another boy, Chris, and he did real well in that class."
"I know how you feel."
"It looks bad now, but things will be better tomorrow."
"There's nothing wrong with you that a couple of years of growth won't help."

Interestingly enough, reassuring or supporting statements are the second most popular responses used by untrained helpers when they are trying to be understanding. Only advice and evaluation are used more frequently. Why are such statements so popular?

In most cases, people report that they are trying to build self-confidence—to encourage a person to do better. Yet, when the statement has been studied in terms of its impact, the result is less than expected. The real message that comes through is: "You should not feel as you do." Rather than communicate acceptance, respect, or understanding, it treats the person's feelings as of little importance.

Have you heard statements similar to the following?

"It's always dark, just before the sun shines."
"We cannot direct the wind, but we can adjust our sails."
"Things will be better tomorrow."
"Remember, each dawn is a new beginning."
"Nobody's perfect."
"Things take time."
"Well, people are only human."

These philosophical truisms or Pollyanna-like statements are intended to offer encouragement, hope, and security, but they frequently communicate a lack of interest or understanding. While reassuring or supporting statements might make a person feel good at first, later, the real impact sets in and there is a feeling of being misunderstood. Thus, the conclusion: "Hey, you really didn't understand me—you just wanted to get rid of me."

Analyzing/interpreting

Some people think that they can be effective by analyzing a situation for another person. Analyzing and interpreting responses gained their popularity from early counseling theories. Old movies show counselors/therapists attempting to analyze problems, trying to tell persons why they are doing the things they are doing. It is an attempt to look at some deep, hidden reasons that cause behavior.

Analyzing/interpreting responses also gained their popularity from the theory that there is always a reason people do the things they do. If people only had more insight about their behaviors, they could change. Look at these responses:

"Don't you see that being critical of your boss is just another way of expressing your unhappiness with your father?"

"You want to be an engineer because your father wants that for you."

"You don't participate in the group because you're a shy person you're afraid of failing."

"You want to be in Mrs. Johnson's room because she was your sister's teacher."

The intent is to explain the reason behind the person's thoughts or behaviors. There is an attempt to give the person some more insight by connecting one event to another. These responses are marked with "because" terminology and suggest what the person might or should think. There is an attempt to provide some meaning to a situation, but most people do not like to have their behavior or ideas interpreted. It makes people defensive. It discourages them from revealing more ideas for fear that these ideas might also be interpreted or explained away.

An interpretation may be accurate, but most of the time it is only a guess—a hypothesis at best. Too often interpretative statements are textbook cliches (e.g. "You threw your pencil at her because you wanted attention.") This may or may not be true, but is it facilitative?

Another problem with analyzing or interpreting behavior is that the interpretation usually comes from a generalization about people. We frequently think that because we have studied other people, we now have some ideas as to why certain behavior occurs. The problem, of course, is that none of us like to be seen as a typical textbook case. We like to be viewed as unique. What was true for somebody else may not be true for us.

If you want to be facilitative, you will probably try to avoid such statements as: "Ah, ha! I know what your problem is"; or "The reason you don't like... is because...." Instead, you will want to help people think about themselves and their feelings, rather than guessing what causes them to do the things they do. It is a much safer approach because you do not have to be an "expert" in human behavior.

Advising/evaluating

Think about a time when you had a problem and looked for someone with whom to talk. Did you seek that person out for help in understanding your problem or were you hoping to get some advice? More often than not, you wanted your story to be heard. But, most people cannot wait to hear the story and they tend to rush with advice. However, advice is not always helpful, although it may be a good solution to a problem.

Advice/evaluation is a category which describes responses that tells others how to behave or what to do. Advice is easy to give and most people are willing to give it. You will also note that advice can be a projection of needs, problems, or values. That is, we may begin to tell someone how we would solve the problem if we were in that person's shoes. For instance:

"Don't drop geometry, you'll need it later to get into college."
"Instead of arguing, you should try to see his point of view."
"If you'd make a plan, then you'd get more work done."
"What you need to do is to talk with your supervisor about your concerns."
"One of the best things you can do now is to apologize and ask to get back in the group."

Listen to a group of people for awhile and you will soon hear some form of advice creeping into the conversation. It is easy to recognize and it frequently follows such lead-ins as:

"You should...."
"If I were you, I would...."
"The best way is to...."
"If you do not..., then...."
"If you would only...."
"You need to...."
"The thing to do is...."

When advice is relevant and practical, it can be helpful. It might facilitate people toward their goals. This is especially true when it is offered at an appropriate time and is in the form of a suggestion instead of a directive or command. People will look to you for some timely advice and you will want to advise them on occasion. But, remember that it shifts the responsibility for decision-making and is usually perceived as less respectful, understanding, and accepting.

People should have an opportunity to be responsible for their own decisions. There is a lot of satisfaction in resolving problems. When we are given advice and we come to depend on it, there is a growing feeling that we are not responsible for ourselves and that we are not capable of making decisions. When others seem so capable in giving advice by making the solution sound so easy, we may begin to feel inadequate. This feeling of inadequacy creates more anxiety and defensiveness. Thus, advice with this type of impact is not facilitative and may even be harmful.

Evaluative statements are judgmental, whether positive or negative. They are unlikely to be facilitative. Even when used as a reinforcer, as advocated by learning theorists (e.g. That is great! Good!), evaluation often closes the door to open communication. People are less inclined to self-disclose for fear of being rejected. Praise and criticism, although well-intended, communicate that you are judging the person.

Evaluation also makes us defensive in our thinking. This is true even when it is positive. When people evaluate our work, there is a tendency to think some of the following thoughts:

"They think that I am...."
"They want me to...."
"They probably won't like it if I...."
"I guess that means that they are... and I am...."

Some people use advice and evaluation in an attempt to encourage us to do something. When praise (evaluation), for example, is used to motivate, there is a tendency for us to believe that certain expectations must be met before we are of value.

Still another problem of evaluating or giving advice is that it is often viewed as coming from a position of authority. The advice-giver assumes a role of superiority, while the receiver "looks up" to the expert. When a person is having a problem, that person does not want to feel inferior or talked down to.

It is much easier to give advice than it is to give of our time and get involved with another person's problems and conflicts. Giving advice is expedient and at first glance, it makes us think that we are moving things along. Perhaps that is why it is so prevalent in our society. It is quick, fast, and easy, but often it is not very facilitative.

This is not to say that advice or evaluation should never be used. No doubt we have all benefited from some good advice at one time or another. When advice is timely and relevant to a situation, it has positive impact and can be very helpful.

To avoid giving non-facilitative advice, slow yourself down. You might first think to yourself: "I know what might be done, but I wonder if they will come to the same idea through exploring the situation more"; or "I know what I would do, but maybe if I help them examine the ideas and clarify the situation, they might come up with the same solution—or maybe a better one."

Effective peer helpers value the ideas of others and try to understand the meaning and importance of them. They avoid labeling us (e.g. "snob," "weird," "negative," "stupid," "crybaby," "lazy"). They try to avoid statements that begin with: "Well, I think you should..." or "What you need to do is...." They know there is a place for advice and evaluation, but it is important to restrain early advice and evaluation in an attempt to find the most appropriate solution.

Summary

Because some helpers want to push things along in their busy schedules, they have a tendency to use too many low-facilitative responses. Impatience and a press for time often causes them to rush in with low facilitative responses. You are going to give advice occasionally. As a helper, you will give reassuring statements and occasionally you may make interpretations. But, it is timely advice, timely interpretations, and timely reassurance that makes the critical difference.

There probably are other responses that might be included as high facilitative responses. Such responses need not be denied or negated; rather, they might be considered in the context of the facilitative model. Our assumption is that if you are attempting to increase the frequency of the high facilitative responses in your work as a peer helper, then you are probably doing many things right. You are likely to be deeply involved in the helping process and you probably can take more risks, recover more from what may seem to be mistakes, and achieve more goals.

Chapter 6

Giving Feedback: Complimenting and Confronting

Non-verbal and verbal communication take place rapidly between people. When people talk and relate with one another, impressions are formed. These impressions are a result of the personal impact that people have on each other. No matter the topic or the flow of conversation, a host of interpersonal variables affect how people see and behave with each other.

Feedback Defined

"Feedback" is a term that was first used in electronics. Technically speaking, it implies that a circuit is looped back to its original source and this flow back allows for a verification or modification of the effect that produced the results. Thermostats in our houses, for example, use information about temperature to activate air conditioning or heating units. Commercial airline pilots depend upon feedback from flight instruments to confirm or correct the flight of an airplane. In a similar sense, feedback can be a part of peer helping.

Feedback is telling others the type of personal impact they are having on you. It can confirm what you think is happening, the type of impressions you are making, or what others are experiencing when they are with you. It can also be used to confront behavior and attitudes, and to suggest changes. Personal feedback, especially when facilitative, can be valuable to help people stay on track, to make minor adjustments, or to chart new directions.

We know there are some blind spots in our helping relationships. They occur when we do not tell others the type of impact they are having on us. Thus, the other person is blind to that information. When people share what they have noticed about us, then our blind spots are reduced.

For instance, there are things that you have observed about your friends which you probably have not shared with them. You have been with them in different places and noticed how they behaved—for better or for worse. You watched and listened, and you had certain personal reactions. Unless you took the time to tell them what you experienced when you noticed what they did, that information is unknown to them. Perhaps they assume things about you that are not true. Maybe they think what they did had no bearing on your feelings and behavior.

Feedback, either as a compliment or as confrontation, when done in a facilitative way, can improve relationships between people. Relationships are not one-sided. If you are only listening and responding to other people's ideas and feelings, they may begin to wonder about your own thoughts, especially those concerning them. They want to know what you are thinking and feeling. They want some feedback from you.

How do we learn about ourselves? How do we learn who we are? Our parents, friends, neighbors, and others in our lives say and do things which influence us. Sometimes what they say is related to general events and situations and sometimes it is related to other people. Sometimes what they say and do is directly related to how they see us. If their thoughts and feelings about us are clear, then we do not have to make assumptions or read between the lines. If they are hidden, fuzzy, or imprecise, then we can become confused and uncertain. It can cause us to be wary or overly cautious.

Learning theorists tell us that our behavior is influenced by its consequences. If you tell a joke and people laugh, then you might think of yourself as a good story teller and you may be encouraged to tell other stories, or at least to retell the same one. But, if people were to frown or scowl, instead of laugh at the story, then you might doubt yourself and wonder if you should give up telling that story. Your image of yourself may change and subsequently, lead you to conclude that you are not very good at telling stories, which in turn makes you less likely to tell them in the future. Some theorists refer to this as reinforcement and suggest that if you are positively reinforced, you will continue to repeat similar actions.

For our purposes, we can view complimenting and confronting as forms of personal feedback. When done in a facilitative way, they are added to the list of the other high facilitative skills described in the previous chapter. How can you give people feedback without judging them? How can you give feedback without making people feel defensive?

The Facilitative Feedback Model

Facilitative feedback consists of a three-part response. How you put your thoughts into these three parts will determine whether you are giving a compliment or a gentle confrontation. Look closely at the three parts.

Part 1: Be specific about the behavior.

What has the person done? Give an example or cite an instance of when you noticed the behavior. Avoid labeling or using generalities by giving specifics and describing what you saw or heard.

Part 2: Tell how the behavior makes you feel.

Tune into yourself and sort out your feelings. If it helps, think about a list of pleasant and unpleasant feeling words. Pick the one or two that stand out when in the presence of that behavior. Is your experience pleasant or unpleasant? Or do you have mixed feelings? Select your words carefully.

Part 3: Tell what your feelings make you want to do.

When you feel as you do, because of being in the presence of the person's behavior, how do you want to respond/react?

For practice, let's see if you can identify the three parts of facilitative feedback in the following response:

"Chris, you said you were going to get your report to me by Friday morning and you did. I also noticed that it followed the outline, just as we agreed upon. I'm proud of you and it makes me want to work with you again on other projects."

Now, try this example:

"Sandy, I'm confused. I'm not sure what I want to say but I have to talk with you. This morning you came into the office and said that you were no longer going to work with me and that you were getting nothing out of our meetings. Yet, you continue to make appointments."

In the first example, a compliment was paid to Chris and three parts of the facilitative feedback model were presented in a 1, 2, 3 order of parts. In the case of Sandy, however, the three parts appeared in a different order (2, 3, 1) and were the basis of a confrontation.

The order of the feedback parts can be interchanged. It is possible that their placement might create a different emphasis, but the difference is probably not significant. The three parts can be mixed easily. Only the first two parts are needed for a basic feedback response.

Peer helpers who have used it report that the model helps to slow them down, to collect and organize their thoughts, and to communicate more accurately. The parts are a format, similar to one that you might use to write a well-organized and thoughtful letter. They are also like the elements of a math formula, with each part contributing to a result.

As you can see, the difference between a compliment and a confrontation can be found in part 2, which focuses on feelings. If you speak about your pleasant feelings, your feedback will be perceived as a compliment. If you use unpleasant feeling words, then it will likely be experienced by the other person as a confrontation.

When you are working with a group, you can give feedback to an individual or you can direct it to the group generally. You might say something like:

"You know, I really look forward to our meetings. I guess it's because I'm so encouraged and impressed with our group. For instance, we've been exploring this last topic for almost 25 minutes and you seem to be listening carefully to what each person is saying. Your eyes were turned to each person who talked and there have been some excellent questions asked."

Again you can see the three parts. In this example, the order of the parts is reversed (3, 2, 1), but the compliment is clear. It is much better than a simple, "Gee, this is a great group.

We are getting a lot done and you are good group members." Although enthusiasm and pleasure may be communicated through the voice and gestures, the group members are left hanging regarding what they did to merit such a conclusion.

They have to guess about the personal impact of their behaviors. Look at this example:

"The trouble with you, Tina, is that you're lazy. If you'd just work harder and get your priorities straight, you'd do a lot better. What you need to do is...."

In this situation, the person talking to Tina was bombarding her with labels and advice. Tina was being judged and criticized. Such feedback, even if well-intended, was probably not very effective. If it was meant to inspire Tina, the message probably did not accomplish its goal. It most likely caused her to feel guilty, or even angry. It tended to provoke defensiveness. There was no gentleness, no specific information, no caring, and no personal sharing of the impact that Tina's behavior was having on the person. Such feedback is likely to make Tina defensive, argumentative, and unwilling to explore her situation.

In a similar fashion, shallow praise also fails to communicate feedback. For instance:

"One thing I've noticed about you, Larry, is that you are such a nice person. You've got a great personality. If others were like you, things would be much better around here."

This response was probably intended as a compliment. However, the response was not specific and general labels were used. Larry was left with a vague idea that the person likes him, but he is probably not sure why. He may even wonder what he did to deserve such a positive remark. "Great personality." What does that mean? He might still have said, "Thanks."

Some Helpful Guidelines

Most people enjoy hearing compliments. They like to know that they have made a favorable impression—that they have been noticed in a positive way. Compliments create warm feelings and make people think friendly thoughts.

Some researchers have suggested that teachers praise students, even with such brief evaluative words such as "Great" or "Excellent," only about two to three percent of the time. This also seems to be true of parents and their children. It follows that, without much modeling, compliments are not even common among friends. One person said about his close friend that he didn't need to say anything. His friend knew how positively he felt toward him and how important their friendship was. Yet, the friend, when asked, replied that he sensed the closeness too and enjoyed it, but he still wasn't quite sure what his friend liked about him. "There are just some good feelings between us and we click well together.... I'm not sure why."

We often assume too much and we need to communicate our positive feelings more, especially when they are related to something that someone has done. General guidelines are not needed for compliments, except you are encouraged to use all three parts of the facilitative feedback model.

We have learned, however, that when we share our unpleasant feelings—a form of confrontation—there is a tendency for people to be threatened and to pull back. They may become suspicious and wonder about our motives. No doubt we will get their attention. If you want people to hear your message, consider the following guidelines.

First, do you have any "chips in the bank?" This expression is another way of asking if you have taken the time to listen to others, to respond to them with other high facilitative responses, and to encourage them to talk about the situation that is of concern to them. Every time you use a feeling-focused response, clarify or summarize an idea, and ask an open-ended question, you are building a positive relationship. You are investing in that personal relationship with each response, perhaps enough to give you a reserve of

goodwill and a friendship upon which you can draw. Without such a reserve, a confrontation may fall on deaf ears or have little impact.

Some persons have reported that they intended to confront others, but after listening to their stories and after making an effort to use other facilitative responses, there was more understanding and fewer unpleasant feelings. There was no need to confront. For example, if you have someone in mind who strikes you in an unpleasant way, make a concentrated effort to listen to that person and to increase the frequency of your high facilitative responses—no matter the topic. You will probably gain a better idea of whether or not you want to speak up regarding your unpleasant feelings.

Secondly, is your unpleasant feeling a persistent one? Nobody likes a grouch or someone who "pops off" at every little turn. Life is full of conflict and you do not want to confront everyone who has created an unpleasant feeling in you. However, it is neither healthy nor wise to let things build to the point that they "boil over." That can be messy and hard to clean up. When persistent feelings are left to simmer and boil, then a relationship suffers. Timely confrontations are valuable and have a place in a facilitative relationship.

There are times, of course, when you will not be able to build up that reserve in advance. You might have just met someone. You will have to gamble that a confrontation (speaking about your unpleasant feelings) will not bankrupt the relationship. A few "chips in the bank" before your feedback may be valuable.

Finally, which words best communicate your ideas? If you are too intense and choose words that are loaded with heavy emotion, you run the risk of not being heard. The impact of the feedback response could be diminished, if not dismissed.

There are many unpleasant feeling words which could be used in a confrontation. Some are similar, but they each have a slightly different shade of meaning. Let your inner experience help you to find the most appropriate feeling

word. It is not helpful, for instance, to tell other people that you "hate" them, when what they do "irritates" or "annoys" you. Likewise, the term "love" can, occasionally, be too powerful or too intense for some persons. You might prefer to use feeling words such as "close," "care," "warm," or "affectionate." Words that are too intense may not serve your purpose. Obviously, your choice of words depends upon the situation, your best judgment, and your personal style.

Suggestions or advice, if any, may be included as one aspect of the third part of the feedback model, but it is more effective when qualified and linked to the source—your feelings. While change might be considered, maybe implied, in a confrontation, it is that person's responsibility to continue or change the behavior. When feedback is tied in with advice ("...therefore, you should..."), it may not be effective. This goes beyond the purpose of feedback, which is to communicate the impact that someone's behavior is having.

Your effectiveness can also be improved if you remember to be concise in your remarks. Try to avoid wordiness or repeating yourself. The message can get lost when there are too many words or if there are too many ideas in one statement. Being concise and to the point also keeps you from rambling and saying things you do not want to say.

While the feedback model can help you organize your thoughts and feelings, they must be authentic ones. It would be a serious mistake to make something up or to say something you think someone wants or needs to hear. Any attempt to contrive a feedback response that is less than honest will defeat your purpose and show disrespect.

In addition, you may use the model to give yourself some feedback. How would you compliment yourself? What about a confrontation? You may, on occasion, want to elicit some personal feedback from others. While they will speak for themselves, you can coach them through a thinking process by asking questions directed to each of the three parts: What have I done... and how has that made you feel... and behave?

Summary

Facilitative feedback, the art of complimenting and confronting, is an essential skill for effective peer helpers. Giving and receiving feedback can be threatening or exciting. Its effectiveness often depends upon timing and readiness. Obviously, the more chips that you have in the relationship's bank, the more likely the person will be receptive to hearing what you have to say.

Facilitative feedback is systematic. It offers you some degree of control over your emotions. It can generate energy in a relationship. After you have given feedback, regardless of whether it was a compliment or a confrontation, it is time to be attentive again. This is especially true if you are confronting. It is not a time to sit back and relax, perhaps thinking, "Whew, I'm glad that's over." Rather, it is time to go to work, to watch for reactions, and to listen carefully to the next response. Your subsequent attentive listening and observing will no doubt call for more high facilitative responses.

Feedback tends to make people feel closer in a relationship, no matter whether the focus is on pleasant or unpleasant feelings. This depends, of course, on how those feelings are communicated. With the help of feedback, relationships grow as people work their way through events, thoughts, and feelings. Communication is more open. There is an increased awareness and an added dimension of honesty and genuineness.

Chapter 7

Deciding

You now know the value of listening to others, identifying feelings, and making high facilitative responses. What's next? As a peer helper, you will be hearing problems—sometimes very difficult ones. Although you are not a professional counselor, you can help people solve their problems.

Behind every problem is a decision that has to be made. There is a choice, or sometimes many choices, that an individual must make to resolve a problem. Many people find it difficult to make a decision because they are confused. They do not know how to get organized or to attack the situation. Peer helpers assist others to solve problems by working with them in a decision-making process and by encouraging them to apply this process in their daily lives.

It is important to make good decisions. Each decision people make influences their future. Individuals become the product of their choices because they determine the direction their lives will take. Choosing cannot be avoided; therefore, helping people to learn how to make responsible choices and decisions is a part of peer helping.

Good decisions can result when a systematic approach is applied to the problems at hand. Typically, people seeking help are looking for a quick solution to their problems. They may seek advice from a neutral party, or from someone they perceive to be an expert, hoping that the advice will bring them relief and satisfaction. This hope and expectation frequently tempts helpers to jump in with some type of advice. Advice-giving, you recall, is considered a low facilitative response. While advice may be appropriate, people seeking help are unlikely to follow advice or make wise choices without the aid of an effective decision-making process. Peer helpers can assist individuals to learn and to internalize a decision-making model that can be used whenever they are required to make an important decision.

A 5-step Decision-making Model

Responsible and effective decisions are more likely to result if the person trying to make a decision performs five specific tasks: Defining, investigating, choosing, acting, and evaluating. These tasks are approached through five focused questions.

1. What is my specific problem or concern?
2. What are the alternatives and the consequences of each?
3. Which of the possible alternatives should I choose?
4. When and how will I act upon my choice?
5. How will I know if I made the right choice?

As you help someone to resolve a problem, make a special effort to use—and teach—this systematic approach to problem-solving and decision-making. Then, the next time that individual faces an important decision, the model can be used again, even if your are not there to help. Now, let's examine these tasks and questions in more detail.

1. Defining: What is my specific problem or concern?

The first step to solving a problem is to identify and know the problem. While individuals may be experiencing anxiety, frustration, or other discomforting feelings related to their problems, when asked: "What is the problem?" they may find it difficult to explain. The pressure of the pending decision can be so great as to prevent them from clearly identifying the issues. Using high facilitative responses (e.g. focused feeling, clarifying and summarizing, and open questions), peer helpers can assist individuals to talk about and define their problems.

You will want to discuss as many specific details as you can. Advice given to beginning newspaper reporters could be useful here. Obtain answers to the questions: Who? What? When? Where? and How? For example: Who else is involved in the situation? What specifically is the issue? When and where does the problem occur and under what conditions? Answers to these and other questions can help an individual examine a problem or concern.

How a problem is defined determines to some degree what action will be taken to solve it. If a problem is defined in vague and philosophical terms, it is difficult to develop a concrete plan of action. Clearly defined problems are needed before you can decide on a plan of action. For example, instead of defining a problem as one of depression or low self-concept, ask what needs to happen or what needs to be learned that would improve the situation. Defining the problem specifically enables you and the people you are helping to think of questions that must be answered and tasks that must be accomplished as you work together.

2. Investigating: What are the alternatives and consequences of each?

In every decision there are many alternatives. Decision-making could be an impossible task if you were to investigate *every* possible one. Peer helpers are interested in highlighting choice-making and shedding light on alternative choices. Enabling people to make satisfying decisions requires that they be aware of a reasonable and manageable number of alternatives.

It is usually productive to help people list as many alternative solutions as they can, without evaluating or judging those possibilities. "Brainstorming" is one technique for generating alternatives without a concern for their consequences. Permitting the free-flow of ideas, however ridiculous they may sound at the moment, might result in some ideas being listed that could eventually lead to viable alternatives. A quick review of the list should reveal several ideas that merit further exploration.

For every possible solution or alternative, there can be positive or negative consequences. The preferred choice is usually one where the pleasant outcomes outweigh the unpleasant ones. Therefore, identifying the consequences of each alternative before making a choice is a valuable step. Sometimes all the alternative solutions are unpleasant and the individual chooses not to decide. Choosing not to decide is in itself a decision. When you help others realize that non-decisions are really decisions, the choice is often to take a more active control of life and to make more conscious, enlightened decisions. To this end, helping others to learn and apply the decision-making model results in more responsible individuals.

3. Choosing: Which of the alternatives should I choose?

After exploring some alternatives and consequences, it is time to make a choice. What is important to the individual? Although individuals are aware of some of their feelings and beliefs, they frequently are not sure of their values. A personal value system is the core of what drives a person. Clarifying values is an integral part of making a thoughtful and personally rewarding decision.

Although the choices most individuals make are generally most advantageous to them, some thought should be given to the needs and interests of others as well. More often than not, somebody else is affected by every decision, since people do not live in isolation. What impact will such a choice have on others? How will this, in turn, affect the type of consequences that might be experienced? Will the decision create more or less problems with other people? Is the final decision something that the person is willingly to own and to be responsible for?

Although choosing is a basic right of every human being, some individuals have developed the habit of deferring much of their decision-making responsibilities to others. They prefer situations which require a minimum amount of decision-making on their part. They are captives of their environment, abandoning a large portion of their natural lives. Peer helpers can encourage these individuals to exercise their personal and public choices by helping them to understand and value the decision-making process.

While there are some events in life which we do not control (e.g. birth, the aging process, natural disasters and death), we do have a choice as to how to react or cope with them. Even when confronted with problems that have been caused by others and where we find ourselves in situations not easily controlled, we remain free to choose how we will feel about these situations and how we will respond. Central to mastering the decision-making process, therefore, is accepting the challenge and responsibility for making a choice.

4. Acting: When and how will I act upon my choice?

Procrastination is a self-defeating behavior that plagues most of us. Even after a decision has been made, special attention must be given to implementing the decision. Obviously, this calls for a plan of action.

A plan of action outlines various steps which will move a person toward a goal. Each plan should contain specific things to be done and a time table for doing them. A clearly stated action plan will make assessing the outcomes easier.

When action is continually delayed, careful attention should be given to the first part of the plan. Perhaps the problem was not clearly defined. Alternatives may not have been realistic or feasible. The consequences were not carefully considered or thoroughly explored. If a subsequent review of the decision-making process results in the same action plan, the steps of the plan might be further delineated into still smaller and more immediate steps. In addition, it might be productive to explore the feelings associated with the first few steps and their relationship to avoidance. Are the feelings a cue that the choice or decision is not a satisfactory one and that additional efforts are needed to think through the situation?

5. Evaluating: How will I know if I made the right choice?

After a choice or decision has been made and the plan implemented, outcomes need to be assessed. How do you know if the right choice was made? One's personal values system will influence the evaluation procedures and the interpretation of results. Ask the question: "How am I feeling about what has happened?" If the internal feedback received is compatible with the value system, positive feelings should result. The more intimately individuals experience themselves and their surroundings, the easier it becomes to predict the results from their decisions.

After the results of a decision has been evaluated, the decision-making process begins all over. New alternatives are considered and new plans are developed.

Decision-making Dialogue

Look at the dialogue below. It is a short synopsis of an interaction between a helper and a helpee. It illustrates the five steps and questions in the decision-making model.

Defining

Peer Helper:
How can I help you? What is the problem?

Helpee:
I'm not sure. Things haven't been going very well for me at work these past months. I don't seem to have the same enthusiasm for the job I used to have. I'm not sure what's going on.

Peer Helper:
You're frustrated at work and don't know what has happened to make things seem so discouraging.

Helpee:
It is frustrating.... My job hasn't changed.... I still work with the same people... but, it is getting harder to go to work every day.

Peer Helper:
Although your job appears to be the same, something is keeping you from enjoying your work the way you used to.

Helpee:
Yes, I find myself thinking about excuses that I could use to keep from going to work.

Peer Helper:
What is it at work that you are trying to avoid?

Helpee:
It's just become so dull. There is nothing happening anymore. The challenge is gone.

Investigating

Peer Helper:
What might you do at work to make it more interesting?

Helpee:
Well, I guess I could volunteer for some new assignments. Lately I've only been doing what others ask me to do.

Peer Helper:
Volunteering for some tasks, that's one possible alternative. Are there any others?

Helpee:
It's ridiculous, but I could turn my work into a game—you know, pretend I'm a ball player or something.

Peer Helper:
It seems a little silly to you, but let's put it down anyway. We'll look at how feasible it is later.

Helpee:
I suppose I could set some new goals. I don't feel like I accomplish anything in a given day. I just plod along.

Peer Helper:
Setting daily performance goals might help you to measure your achievements. Are there any other possibilities?

Helpee:
No, I don't think so.

Peer Helper:
Nothing else is coming to mind. Okay, now, let's look at the list of possibilities. First, the idea about volunteering for a new assignment.

Heli ee:
That could create some problems. I realize now that I am good at what I do. It could be a challenge, but then, who would do my job?

Peer Helper:
You seen skeptical about that one and wondering who would replace you. All right, look at the next one.... "Turn the job into a game...." What did you mean by that?

Acting

Peer Helper:
Talk some more about your plan.

Helpee:
I am going to start on the project tonight. I need to make some charts and I need to decide how I will measure my progress. After I get the charts made, I will begin to use them.

Peer Helper:
What will be the first day you plan to use them at work?

Helpee:
I'm going to try to have them ready for use on Monday.

Peer Helper:
Try?

Helpee:
I'll do more than try. I'll start Monday morning keeping track of my progress on three major tasks.

Peer Helper:
Your enthusiasm seems to be running higher, as you talk about it.

Helpee:
Yeah, but I'm still not sure about the game part or how to reward myself.

Peer Helper:
First, let's look at the reward and then the rules of the game. What are some things that you like to do?

Helpee:
I read somewhere that if you could get the same enthusiasm for work that you have for sports and leisure activities, work can be more fun. That's what got me thinking about my third alternative, setting daily performance goals.

Peer Helper:
You seem more excited about that idea. Tell me more about the possibilities of that one.

Helpee:
I think that one makes the most sense. Although my work is somewhat routine, it would be a challenge to measure how much I accomplish in a day. Maybe I could setup a chart listing each of my major tasks, measure how much I do, set some goals to improve my performance, and reward myself with something special if I reach my goals. It sounds a lot better than what I'm doing right now.

Choosing

Peer Helper:
From the excitement in your voice, I get the impression that you have made a choice.

Helpee:
Well, yes I have. Actually, I am combining two alternatives. I will make a game out of my work by setting up some daily performance goals that I can shoot at.

Peer Helper:
Okay, now how will you go about that?

Evaluating

Peer Helper:
How has it been going?.

Helpee:
A lot better. I really had lost my energy and hated going to work. My production was really down. But, I've come up 40% in the last week. My goal for the rest of the month is to increase it by another 10%. And, guess what, my boss noticed the difference. He's gotten in the act too. He said I could take the Chicago trip, which is kind of a bonus, if I hit the 50% mark. Not bad, huh?

Peer Helper:
You seem a lot more encouraged about your work.

Helpee:
Yes! I wished we had talked months ago.

Now, give yourself an opportunity to practice. Answer each of these questions as they relate to a current problem or concern in your own life:

1. What is my problem or concern?
2. What are the alternatives and consequences of each?
3. Which of the possible alternatives should I choose?
4. When and how will I act upon my choice?
5. How will I know if I made the right choice?

Summary

One important task for peer helpers is helping others learn how to make good decisions. Good decisions result when people apply a systematic approach to problem-solving. Five specific tasks constitute one decision-making model recommended for peer helping. Good decision-makers learn how to: 1) define the problem; 2) investigate alternatives and consequences; 3) make a choice; 4) take action; and 5) evaluate the results.

As a peer helper, you can apply some of the facilitative skills and helping relationship concepts to decision-making. In addition, it is time to consider some helping projects that might give you an opportunity to share what you have learned with others.

Chapter 8

Helping Projects for Peer Helpers

Effective peer helper programs provide systematic training in interpersonal and facilitative skills, careful supervision, and organized helping projects. Peer helpers are encouraged to reach out to people, seizing upon opportunities to work with others when occasions arise. Responding spontaneously in these situations, peer helpers use their training to help others in need. Helping projects, in contrast, are organized efforts which selectively put peer helpers in situations where they can put their skills into practice.

Helping projects maximize the affect of a training program. First, they give helpers-in-training something to point toward, giving more meaning to their preparation. Peer helpers can imagine how they might work in certain situations, making training more purposeful and relevant. Second, organized projects enable trainers and helpers to plan for the use of certain skills and systematic interventions. Third, projects usually bring visibility and credibility to peer helper programs. Finally, since the projects are planned around specific goals and objectives, it is easier to evaluate the work of the helpers.

Projects are typically aimed at a specific group or population. They tend to be organized in sequential steps or stages and take place within a given time. Special events or activities are scheduled. Some projects require more skills than others, just as some require more support and supervision.

Most projects are organized around the four basic roles: 1) assistant; 2) tutor; 3) special friend; and 4) small group leader. The assistant role tends to involve more indirect services, working with professional staff members who take the lead, while the peer helper provides support through specific responsibilities and tasks. Tutors, both in and out of schools, can coach and teach. They might focus on an academic subject, physical skills, job procedures, or life management skills. A special friend gives attention, listens, and supports people in their efforts to accomplish things. Finally, small group leaders work in structured group sessions where they lead or co-lead discussions. Dividing large groups into smaller peer helper-led groups enables more participants to talk and share ideas.

You might think of some projects that would be possible in your setting. At first, they might be limited in scope. Then, after some experience, more extended projects could be planned. Beginning projects usually require fewer skills and less time. As selfconfidence grows and skills are refined through experience and supervision, more advanced projects can be developed.

Peer helpers learn at their own individual paces and some are ready to be involved in more extensive projects sooner than others. Some helpers have a greater sense of what is required of them in certain situations. Some helpers need closer supervision. But, when a project is carefully planned, all trained peer helpers can play important roles.

The following examples are presented to stimulate your thinking. They were featured in *The Peer Facilitator Quarterly* and can be modified to meet your interests and needs. Trainers often provide their own creative touch through clever names, activities, and procedures.

Suggested Helping Projects

Helping Interviews

As special friends, peer helpers can encourage others to talk about themselves, to explore some of the issues that are affecting their lives, and to think about how they might resolve some of their problems. In one high school, peer helpers were assigned an office in which students could talk to them in individual conferences. Topics ranged from student-teacher conflicts to improving study habits. Mock job interviews were also arranged, so that graduating seniors could practice applying for a job or for scholarship interviews.

Peer Support Groups

Some people benefit from knowing that they are not alone when it comes to facing a particular situation. Although peer helpers need not have the same problem as group members, some groups are organized around a common concern or situation. Parents who have children with serious or chronic illnesses and might benefit from a support group. People who are trying to lose weight or change their eating habits might also benefit from peer support. A peer support group for pregnant high school girls can play a major role in helping participants graduate.

Planning Leisure Activities

People of all ages often need help deciding on effective ways to use their leisure time. High school students have led groups of younger students in middle school to help them talk about loneliness, time management, and the anxiety associated with unsupervised spare time. One peer group met for 10 sessions during the lunch hour. Likewise, a senior citizen's group can help draw out retired persons who are unsure of what to do with their extra time. Teaching the peer helpers, who are retirees themselves, to reach out and encourage others was part of the training.

Peer Tutoring

In a study center at a high school, peer tutors provided academic assistance in a variety of subject areas. The center had a list of tutors for each academic subject. Peer tutors met with self- and teacher-referred students. Tutoring ranged from one session to several regularly scheduled meetings during a grading period.

A physically handicapped peer helper might tutor a similarly handicapped person in a certain skill, such as how to manage a wheel chair, drive a car, or cope with an insensitive observer. Elderly persons in a retirement home can learn to tutor others in various hobbies or skills. Coaches can draw upon high school students who are proficient in some sport to work with younger students (cross-age tutoring) who are eager to receive special attention. However, tutoring is not simply a matter of drilling or telling others what to do. Peer helpers use their skills to facilitate the self-doubters, the discouraged, the resistant, and the worriers.

Buddy Systems

When people are new to a situation, they might feel uneasy and have a difficult time adjusting. Peer helpers, working through a buddy or special friend project, might make the transition easier. For instance, in many schools peer helpers are assigned as special "greeters and meeters." They take turns meeting new students, talking with them about general school procedures, and welcoming them to the school. They help acquaint them with the building and introduce them to others.

In one school, a "new-student group" met Friday afternoons to talk about their experiences at the school. They asked questions of peer helpers, who facilitated discussions and made referrals when appropriate. The peer helpers were "buddies" for the grading period, serving as personal resources. The Friday meetings were voluntary and open, as participants no longer needed the group or the assistance of the peer helpers, they moved onto other groups within the school.

Working with the Handicapped

As part of a friendship club, peer helpers befriended students in a educable mentally handicapped class on campus. The helpers socialized with their "buddies," tutored them in the classroom, and participated in field-trips with them. Similar services were provided for the hard of hearing, blind, and other physically handicapped students.

Developmental Play Times

Many students who enter kindergarten have not developed their abilities to be effective learners. Sometimes they lack social skills and are unable to listen, follow directions, or cooperate in class activities. Fourth and fifth grade peer helpers have been taught to interact one-to-one with developmentally delayed kindergarten students. Fifteen supervised group sessions were arranged, in which selected play activities featured peer helpers working with their special friends. Close relationships were formed, modeling took place, encouragement was given, and skills were taught.

Large Group Presentations

Peer helpers can organize and take part in large group presentations, such as classroom activities. Presentations through panels, role-playing, skits, and demonstrations might help students think about relevant topics, such as study skills, cheating, coping with stress and test anxiety, preventing suicides and drug abuse, and developing friendships. After a large group presentation by peer helpers or professional staff members, the large group might be divided into smaller discussion groups led by peer helpers.

Peer helpers can also make presentations to civic clubs and groups. They can, with careful preparation, help inform members of community organizations and serve as resources.

Child Safety

Child safety is a topic that is of special interest to parents. They like the idea of peer helpers working with younger children to teach them safety. This may involve common sense behavior around traffic, machines, or common household hazards. In one school, high school peer helpers worked with first and second grade students to help them explore ways to avoid potentially harmful strangers. They role-played situations which required the young children to determine friendly from hostile situations.

In another school, high school peer helpers developed a puppet show which helped elementary school students focus on and talk about the subject of child abuse. The program was so popular that it was requested by every school principal in the district and was praised by concerned teachers who followed up the presentation in their classrooms. Child safety can be presented in an upbeat manner, despite the seriousness of the theme.

S.A.D.D.

In a similar way, students need an increased awareness of the problems that come with the use of drugs and alcohol. High school peer helpers took part in organizing presentations to all drivers' education classes regarding the sad and tragic potential for harm that can result from drunken driving. They showed film strips and played video tapes, after which they led discussions.

In one school where alcohol seemed to be a problem among students, a three-day unit was prepared by peer helpers and presented in classes. They helped form chapters of S.A.D.D. (Students Against Drunk Driving) and organized a campaign within the school that featured banners, slogans, and bulletin boards.

Parent Education

Older and younger generations need to communicate more often and more effectively. This is particularly true of parents and their children, who need to learn how to resolve differences of opinion and conflicts. Peer helpers can lead or co-lead small group discussions and participate on panels where parents and young people discuss parental expectations, common problems of growing up, groundrules, and special needs and interests.

Prevention of Violence

In some cities, violence has become a major concern of students and parents. Peer helpers, trained in conflict resolution, might make a difference. Sometimes they can organize meetings which focus on the prevention of violence and identify the special needs in a community or school.

Peer helpers are not police officers, disciplinarians, or persons acting from an authority base. Rather, they try to befriend those who are the victims or the perpetrators of violence, in an attempt to help them to explore other alternatives or to meet with professional counselors. They might even be able to help mediate some conflicts, depending upon their training.

Sometimes a tragic event takes place in a school or other setting and people want to talk about what happened. They need time to identify the factors that contributed to the event and to sort out what can be done to prevent something similar from happening in the future. Nature's violence, such as a tornado, created a need for peer helpers to talk with classmates and adults in the aftermath of the violent storm.

ESL Rap Groups

English as a second language is a part of many schools, especially in areas where there has been an influx of refugees or immigrants from foreign countries. ESL (English as a Second Language) rap groups give these language and culturally different people an opportunity to talk about their concerns and to practice English in a safe setting. Peer helpers, especially those who are bi-lingual, can lead such groups and help identify special needs. They can assist in seeing that members of the group learn basic "survival" skills in their community.

Summary

Projects for peer helpers focus on the application of what has been learned in a systematic peer training program. Each project has specific goals, some of which may take specialized training and practice. Almost all projects have a time frame in which helpers work.

As a part of the on-going supervision of projects, some peers may be asked to write confidentially about their experiences, sharing the general issues that arise with supervisors and other peer helpers. Training, without being followed by some type of helping project, is like keeping a good race horse in the barn. The integration of helping skills comes about when training is put into practice through projects.

Chapter 9

Guidelines for Peer Helping Programs

Each peer helper program is different. Trainers, and the characteristics of the training group, influence the nature of the training program and the helping projects. Individual programs determine their own special identities, titles, and clever names. Because of the individuality of people, each program has its own uniqueness, which is as it should be.

Still, there are some commonalties which characterize the most effective programs. In response to many letters requesting assistance in formulating new programs, the steering committee of the newly formed National Peer Helpers Association outlined some guidelines. The following are among those proposed guidelines.

Suggested Program Guidelines

Enlist a Trainer

The trainer sets the tone of the program. The trainer is the mentor, the teacher, the coach, and the supervisor. More often than not, the trainer is also a close friend and confidant of the peer helpers.

The best trainers seem to have a successful track record with people. That is, they are congenial individuals who have the personal characteristics desired of good helpers. They are caring, trustworthy, understanding, respectful, and friendly. They also have a sense of humor and are not afraid of reaching out to others, taking a few personal risks to help others. They have a sense of self-confidence which enables them to inspire trainees and to model the skills that are taught. In addition, they take a professional approach to training—they are knowledgeable of the growing peer helper movement and the best practices that are published and described in professional meetings.

If you are considering becoming a trainer, take stock of your personal and professional strengths and weaknesses. Know the areas in which you can improve and the areas in which you will need to rely on the strengths of others. How open are you to learning? How willing are you to put yourself on the line, to model skills, to acknowledge failures, and to keep a positive attitude during trying times? How do you think others see you? What do you do that enables them to see you that way? What are your primary reasons for wanting to be a trainer of peer helpers?

You can be a lone wolf trainer—one who prefers to work independently and quietly without the assistance of other professionals—or you can identify others who can support you in your efforts, drawing upon their special skills and interests. Effective trainers capitalize on all the expertise around them.

Determine Your Goals

Before you start, what are the purposes of your program? What are the projects that you hope to implement initially? What training of peers will be needed before those projects can be started?

Some trainers have organized advisory boards which help identify candidates for training and possible projects. The members of a board might be leaders in your community, agency, or school. The board can help clarify your missions, resources, directions, and evaluation procedures. It can be a source of enthusiasm and encouragement—a group where you can turn for some "peer help."

Obtain Support for Your Program

Whose support will you find personally comforting and encouraging? Whose support will you need to get started or to maintain your program? Most trainers begin by enlisting the support of administrators in their organizations. They might look for support from staff members, teachers, parents, and members of the peer helper population. Some of these supporters are needed to run interference, to help remove obstacles, to obtain funds, or to gain permission. Some might serve on other boards in the community, or they might be members of a philanthropic foundation or charitable organization. Other supporters are friends who can listen and help you explore your alternatives. All your supporters can, if they have enough information, tell others about your program and help you with public relations.

Choose a Site for Training

Find a place to hold the training sessions, as location and size influence the numbers of people you will train and the kinds of training activities that you can do. The physical facility can also determine how much privacy that you have and the equipment that is available. Moveable chairs are desirable, so that trainees can move around the room in small groups, triads, or pairs.

If you are considering marathon training groups or weekend retreats, camp facilities or resorts might be considered. These efforts require careful planning, as other needs must be addressed besides the training sessions (e.g. food, rest rooms, sleeping arrangements, transportation, recreational breaks, and accessibility to supplies and materials). While such retreats often lead to a spirit of camaraderie, a sense of fun and adventure, and a bonding of the training group through the special experience, follow-up is essential. Generally, marathon or weekend training, although exciting and unique, is limited. It is difficult to assimilate all the peer helper concepts and skills in a short training course, especially if no other training sessions are planned. Where will you meet in follow-up sessions?

Where will you meet for supervision? It is helpful to have a headquarters—a base of operation—where the peer helpers can find you, leave messages, and meet other helpers.

Select the Trainees

Although one outcome of the program is the personal growth of the peer helpers themselves, the goal of the program is to be of service to others. Those selected for training should first be caring people who have a desire to be helpers. Being an open learner is another prerequisite, along with being sensitive to self and others. The ability to relate to various cultural and ethnic groups can also be a desirable quality.

Some programs are based on the premise that they are leadership programs and look for natural leaders. While this is not undesirable, popularity and high visibility among others is not necessarily an essential factor. Peer helpers are leaders and they provide leadership in many ways. Some quietly go about their work, not needing any special recognition or visibility. Be cautious about people who want to be trainees who are already over committed to other activities. Be on guard for those who simply want to list it as a credit or honor more than to become personally involved.

Begin with a small number of trainees, if this is your first time. Work with those with whom you have access and whom you enjoy. It is easier to expand your program to include more trainees in the future than have too many trainees who need your attention. Start with a manageable program, imagining how many trainees might participate in training and projects.

It is unnecessary to accept every applicant. You can list the selection criteria and hold yourself to it. Be able to say, "Sorry, not this time." Keep control of your program by controlling the selection of your of trainees.

Organize the Training Curriculum

Given your goals and the projects you have in mind, develop a curriculum for training. There are many published guides that you can draw upon, and there will be more published in the future. Regardless, almost all guides and activities will need to be tailored to your own program.

When training is limited, then projects tend to be limited. When training is comprehensive, there are more opportunities for different projects, some of which cannot be thought of until the trainees have completed most of their training. Most trainers have discovered the value of structured learning experiences and their curricula contain the following eight components:

1. The need for helpers and their value
2. The characteristics of a helping relationship
3. Interpersonal and facilitative skills
4. Basic concepts of human behavior
5. Decision-making and problem-solving skills
6. Referral procedures and support systems
7. Planning for projects and supervision
8. Evaluation of training and helping services

Upon completion of training, peers can help identify projects in which they would like to participate. Some new projects might be developed. Peer helper competencies are matched with performance expectations in a project.

Supervise and Evaluate Services and Projects

Peer helpers like to talk about their helping experiences. They want to share their frustrations and accomplishments with others. But, more important, they need to discuss their situations, so that a trained supervisor can listen to their concerns and help guide their efforts. Knowing when to refer a case is discussed in supervision. Learning how to evaluate one's progress is also considered.

Some projects have specific objectives, perhaps behavioral objectives, which can be easily identified and measured (e.g. attendance, promptness to work, completion of work, or abstaining from smoking or some other habit). Other projects are less defined, making it more difficult to identify objectives or goals. Nevertheless, it is important to develop evaluative procedures and to be accountable.

Network with Other Peer Trainers

One way to share ideas and to learn from other peer trainers is to participate in some type of networking process. Being a member of the National Peer Helpers Association would help you learn more about some of the efforts that are taking place in the nation. *The Peer Facilitator Quarterly*, the official publication of the National Peer Helpers Association, frequently describes programs in action, highlighting their training efforts and projects. Some articles give you additional hints about building your program. The National Peer Helpers Association holds a national conference annually which provides an excellent opportunity for personal interaction with other trainers from throughout the nation.

Some state organizations also are being formed. These organizations hold conferences and publish newsletters to allow for the sharing of ideas. Networking also can be done with other trainers in your area, sharing your mutual enthusiasm and interest in peer helping.

Summary

The key to any program is the trainer, who selects trainees and projects. The key to a trainer's success is the careful selection of trainees, a structured curriculum, and close support groups. Every program is different; yet, there are some common features which often predict favorable program outcomes. Networking on a state or national level provides opportunities for trainers to stay current professionally and to support others who are engaged in the important work of peer helping.

Additional Resources

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Peer Helping: A Practical Guide

by Robert D. Myrick, Ph.D.
and Don L. Sorenson, Ph.D.

Peer helpers are persons who use helping skills and concepts to assist others to think about ideas and feelings, to explore alternatives to situations, and to make responsible decisions. Peer helpers serve people in a variety of settings and in a multitude of situations. The peer helping concepts presented in this book can be learned by people of all ages.

Central to the training program is the facilitative model, a unique package of selected concepts and skills systematically organized as a practical guide to working with others. Coupled with an interest and willingness to reach out to help others, learning and applying the concepts presented in the facilitative model will result in the development of an effective helper.

Peer Helping: A practical Guide can be used as a text for peer helper, lay leadership, or volunteer worker training programs. Attention has been given to presenting the peer helping concepts without emphasizing any particular age group or setting.

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